MODERN EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

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HEGEL AND MODERN SOCIETY

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this series is to help to make contemporary European philosophy intelligible to a wider audience in the English-speaking world, and to suggest its interest and importance in particular to those trained in analytical philosophy.

It is appropriate that the series should be inaugurated with a book on Hegel. For it is by reference to Hegel that one may indicate most starkly the difference between the two traditions to whose intercommunication the series seeks to contribute. The analytical philosophy of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world was developed by Moore, Russell and others in revolt against idealism and the influence of Hegel at the turn of this century. It is true that the British and American idealists had already diverged considerably from Hegel, but their holistic philosophy was certainly Hegelian both in terminology and in aspiration. Moore and Russell themselves obviously owed most to a different tradition stemming from Hume. Nevertheless, they too were influenced by European contemporaries to whose writings they explicitly appealed in their revolt against the British Hegelians. In particular they admired two European philosophers who had very little sympathy for Hegelianism: Brentano in the case of Moore, and in the case of Russell, Frege.

Again, if we look at the modern origins of radicalism or anti-traditionalism in philosophical thought in the English-speaking world – and most of the philosophers of the Vienna Circle were political radicals as well as philosophically iconoclastic – we find another contrast which can be drawn by reference to Hegel. In England philosophical opposition to 'Establishment' ways of thinking and patterns of influence was developed in opposition to Hegel rather than under his influence; the opposite has been true of the more Marxist-orientated philosophers in many European countries, for instance Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in France. In the mid-thirties, just when Hegel's philosophy was being introduced

seriously to the academic world in Paris, A. J. Ayer returned from Vienna to Oxford as a champion of the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, whose chief target of attack was precisely Hegel. It is true that logical positivism was short-lived in England; and even in the United States, to which several members of the Vienna Circle eventually escaped, it represented an important phase rather than a lasting school. But many of the philosophical virtues with which it was most concerned continued to be fostered. What is now called analytical philosophy, with its demand for thoroughness of conceptual analysis and its suspicion of rhetoric and grandiose structures, came to be more and more dominant in the English-speaking world. The philosophical attitude which it represents and which distinguishes it from the dominant European schools of thought is succinctly expressed in the foreword of the *Philosophical Remarks* (1930) of Wittgenstein, whose influence on analytical philosophy was incalculable.

> This spirit is different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. That spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures: the other in striving after clarity and perspicacity in no matter what structure . . . And so the first adds one construction to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is and what it tries to grasp is always the same.

Everyone knows that the labels 'analytical' and 'European' (or 'continental') are very unsatisfactory. Many of the philosophers who have influenced the recent tradition of analytical philosophy in important ways were born and bred on the European mainland (for example, Frege, Poincaré, Schlick), and even if some (such as Wittgenstein, Hempel, Carnap, Popper) moved later in their lives to the United States or England, they first developed their thought in Europe. Von Wright, Hintikka and Føllesdal are very much products of the European philosophical tradition as well as being analytical philosophers in their own right. There are many other philosophers engaged in work of conceptual analysis in the Scandinavian countries, Poland, and, more recently, Germany.

Moreover, the universities of Europe which have not been influenced by the analytical tradition – and these include nearly all of those in France and Italy, and the great majority of those in German-speaking countries and in Eastern Europe – have by no means represented any unitary tradition. The disagreements, or even lack of communication, between, for instance, Hegelians, Marxists, phenomenologists and Thomists have often been deep.

But these disagreements are 'small' in comparison with the barriers of mutual ignorance and distrust between the main representatives of the analytical tradition on the one hand and the main philosophical schools of the European continent on the other (which are also dominant in Latin America, Japan and even some universities in the U.S.A. and Canada). And these barriers are inevitably reinforced by the fact that, until very recently at any rate, even the best students from the universities situated on either side tend to emerge from their studies with such divergent areas of knowledge and ignorance, competence and incompetence, that they are hardly equipped even to enter into informed discussion with each other about the nature of what separates them.

The divergences that lie behind the development of these barriers can properly be understood only by reference back beyond Hegel to Kant, to the very different ways in which different schools of philosophy have reacted to his work and to the further counter-reactions of *their* successors. But the transformation of these divergences into veritable barriers is a relatively recent phenomenon. Brentano, writing on the philosophy of mind at the end of the last century, frequently referred to J. S. Mill and to other contemporary British philosophers. In turn, as we have noticed, Moore refers to Brentano. Bergson discusses William James frequently in his works. For Husserl one of the most important philosophers was Hume. The thinkers discussed seriously by Russell include not only Frege and Poincaré, but also Meinong. How unfortunate, then, that those who have followed in their footsteps have refused to read or respect one another, the one convinced that the other survives on undisciplined rhetoric and an irresponsible lack of rigour, the other suspecting the former of aridity, superficiality and over-subtle trivialization.

The books of this series represent contributions by philosophers who have worked in the analytical tradition, but who now tackle problems specifically raised by philosophers of the main traditions to be found within contemporary Europe. They are works of philosophical argumentation and of substance rather than merely introductory résumés. We believe that they may contribute towards the formation of a richer and less parochial framework of thinking, a wider frame within which mutual criticism and stimulation will be attempted and where mutual disagreements will at least not be based on ignorance, contempt or distortion.

PREFACE

This work is largely a condensation of my *Hegel* (C.U.P., 1975). But the purpose of the condensation was more than just to make a shorter and more accessible book. The book *is* shorter and, I hope, more accessible. I have left out the account of Hegel's logic, perhaps the most difficult part of his system to explain, as well as the interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, and the chapters on art, religion and philosophy.

The shorter book thus has a quite different centre of gravity, and this is its second purpose. The aim was to produce not just an exposition of Hegel, but a view of the ways in which he is relevant and important to contemporary philosophers. I try, in other words, not just to expound Hegel, but also to show how he still provides the terms in which we reflect on some contemporary problems. Perhaps I should state this aim more modestly, and say I wanted to show how Hegel has helped shape the terms in which I think. But such modesty, although seemly, would be insincere. In fact I believe that Hegel has contributed to the formation of concepts and modes of thought which are indispensable if we are to see our way clear through certain modern problems and dilemmas. And that is what I want to argue in the following pages.

The book falls into three chapters. The first is entirely expository. It opens with a new statement of what I see as the problems and aspirations shared by many of Hegel's generation, and continues with what is largely an adaptation of chapter III of *Hegel*. The second chapter considers Hegel's political philosophy, and leads up to a discussion of its relevance today; this is an amended version of *Hegel*, part IV. The final chapter tries to show how the problems and aspirations of Hegel's time continue through certain modifications into our time. These can be seen as centring on the issue of freedom; and I try to show how much our best articulations of this issue owe to Hegel. This chapter largely reproduces the final chapter of the longer work.

I recognize how tentative and fragmentary are many of the points I try to make in the third chapter, and particularly what I say about the twentieth-century focus on questions of language and meaning. Sketchy as it is, what I say is highly contestable. But I don't feel capable of putting forward a more solidly defensible thesis at this stage. We are just now coming to a more dispassionate and penetrating assessment of what is original to the various strands of twentieth-century philosophy. I hope to be able to say something more coherent on this on another occasion.

But for the moment, I share the widely held intuition that some major problems in our philosophy of language are bound up with those which bedevil our conceptions of the human subject, and particularly of freedom. And this is why, I believe, we would benefit greatly from a renewed acquaintance with the work of Herder, Hegel and Humboldt. I hope this book may be of some help in this, at least as regards Hegel.

REFERENCES GIVEN IN ABBREVIATED FORM

BRel	*Begriff der Religion*, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1925.
Differenz	*Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1928.
EG	*System der Philosophie*, part 3: The Philosophy of Spirit, in *SW*, x. References are to paragraphs.
EN	*System der Philosophie*, part 2: The Philosophy of Nature, in *SW*, IX. References are to paragraphs.
GW	*Die germanische Welt*, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1920.
PhG	*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, G. Lasson edition, Hamburg, 1952.
PR	*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1955, or *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford, 1942. Quotations are usually of the Knox edition. References are to paragraphs for the text and to Knox edition pages for the preface.
SW	*Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hermann Glockner, 20 vols., Stuttgart, 1927–30.
VG	*Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1955.
WL	*Wissenschaft der Logik*, G. Lasson edition, Hamburg, 1963.

I

FREEDOM, REASON AND NATURE

I. EXPRESSION AND FREEDOM

Hegel's philosophical synthesis took up and combined two trends of thought and sensibility which arose in his day and are still of fundamental importance in our civilization. To see why Hegel's thought remains of perennial interest we could perhaps best start by identifying these trends and recognizing their unbroken continuity into our time.

Both were reactions in late-eighteenth-century Germany to the mainstream of Enlightenment thought, in particular its French variant, and became important sources of what we know as Romanticism.

The first, which I would like to call 'expressivism',[1] arises with the diffuse movement we know as the *Sturm und Drang*, although it continues well beyond its demise. Its most impressive early formulation comes in the work of Herder.

In a way this can be seen as a protest against the mainstream Enlightenment view of man – as both subject and object of an objectifying scientific analysis. The focus of objection was against a view of man as the subject of egoistic desires, for which nature and society provided merely the means to fulfilment. It was a philosophy which was utilitarian in its ethical outlook, atomistic in its social philosophy, analytic in its science of man, and which looked to a scientific social engineering to reorganize man and society and bring men happiness through perfect mutual adjustment.

Against this, Herder and others developed an alternative notion of man whose dominant image was rather that of an expressive object. Human life was seen as having a unity rather analogous to that of a work of art, where every part or aspect only found its

[1] A term derived from Isaiah Berlin's 'expressionism'; cf. 'Herder and the Enlightenment' in Earl Wasserman (ed.), *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, Baltimore, 1965.

proper meaning in relation to all the others. Human life unfolded from some central core – a guiding theme or inspiration – or should do so, if it were not so often blocked and distorted.

From this point of view the Enlightenment analytic science of man was not only a travesty of human self-understanding, but one of the most grievous modes of self-distortion. To see a human being as in some way compounded of different elements: faculties of reason and sensibility, or soul and body, or reason and feeling, was to lose sight of the living, expressive unity; and in so far as men tried to live according to these dichotomies, they must suppress, mutilate or severely distort that unified expression which they have it in them to realize.

But this science not only cut into the unity of human life, it also isolated the individual from society, and cut men off from nature. For the image of expression was central to this view not just in that it provided the model for the unity of human life, but also in that men reached their highest fulfilment in expressive activity. It is in this period that art came to be considered for the first time the highest human activity and fulfilment, a conception which has had a large part in the making of contemporary civilization. These two references to the expressive model were linked: it is just because men were seen as reaching their highest realization in expressive activity that their lives could themselves be seen as expressive unities.

But men are expressive beings in virtue of belonging to a culture; and a culture is sustained, nourished and handed down in a community. The community has itself on its own level an expressive unity. It is once more a travesty and a distortion to see it as simply an instrument which individuals set up (or ought ideally to set up) to fulfil their individual goals, as it was for the atomist and utilitarian strand of the Enlightenment.

On the contrary, the *Volk* as Herder describes it is the bearer of a certain culture which sustains its members; they can isolate themselves only at the cost of great impoverishment. We are here at the point of origin of modern nationalism. Herder thought that each people had its own peculiar guiding theme or manner of expression, unique and irreplaceable, which should never be suppressed and which could never simply be replaced by any attempt to ape the manners of others (as many educated Germans tried to ape French *philosophes*).

This was perhaps the most remarkably innovative aspect of the expressivist conception. In a way it appears as a throw-back, beyond the analytic, atomistic thought of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, to the unity of Aristotelian form, a unity which unfolds as human life develops. But one of the important innovations which come with the image of expression is the idea that each culture, and within it each individual as well, has its own 'form' to realize, and that no other can replace it or substitute for it, or discover the thread which guides it. Herder is in this way not just the founder of modern nationalism, but also of one of the main bulwarks against its excesses, modern expressive individualism.

Expressivism also sharply broke with the earlier Enlightenment on its notion of man's relation to nature. Man is not body and mind compounded but an expressive unity englobing both. But since man as a bodily being is in interchange with the whole universe, this interchange must itself be seen in expressive terms. Hence to see nature just as a set of objects of potential human use is to blind ourselves and close ourselves to the greater current of life which flows through us and of which we are a part. As an expressive being, man has to recover communion with nature, one which had been broken and mutilated by the analytic, desiccating stance of objectifying science.

This is one important trend which arises in the late eighteenth century in reaction to the main thrust of the French Enlightenment. But there is another, which has at first sight a quite opposite bent. It was a powerful reaction against the radical objectification of Enlightenment thought, but this time against the objectifying of human nature and in the name of moral freedom.

If man was to be treated as another piece of objectified nature, whether in introspection or external observation, then his motivation would have to be explained causally like all other events. Those who accepted this view argued that this was not incompatible with freedom, for was not one free in being motivated by one's own desire, however caused?

But from the standpoint of a more radical view of freedom, this was unacceptable. Moral freedom must mean being able to decide against all inclination for the sake of the morally right. This more radical view of course rejected at the same time a utilitarian definition of morality; the morally right could not be determined by happiness and therefore by desire. Instead of being dispersed throughout his diverse desires and inclinations the morally free subject must be able to gather himself together, as it were, and make a decision about his total commitment.

Now the main figure in this revolution of radical freedom is without question Immanuel Kant. Rousseau in some ways fore-

shadowed the idea, but Kant's was the formulation, that of a giant among philosophers, which imposed itself, then and still today. In a philosophical work as powerful and as rich in detail as Kant's critical philosophy, the tracing of any single theme must involve over-simplification, but it is not too great a distortion to say that the definition of this radically free moral subjectivity was one of the main motivations of Kant's philosophy.

Kant sets out his notion of moral freedom in his second *Critique*. Morality is to be entirely separated from the motivation of happiness or pleasure. A moral imperative is categorical; it binds us unconditionally. But the objects of our happiness are all contingent; none of them can be the ground of such an unconditional obligation. This can only be found in the will itself, in something that binds us because of what we are, that is, rational wills, and for no other reason.

Hence Kant argues that the moral law must be binding *a priori*; and this means that it cannot depend on the particular nature of the objects we desire or the actions we project, but must be purely formal. A formally necessary law, that is, one whose contradictory is self-contradictory, is binding on a rational will. The argument that Kant uses here has been much disputed, and it appears rightly; the Kantian appeal to formal laws which would nevertheless give a determinate answer to the question of what we ought to do has always seemed a little like squaring the circle. But the exciting kernel of this moral philosophy, which has been immensely influential, is the radical notion of freedom. In being determined by a purely formal law, binding on me simply *qua* rational will, I declare my independence, as it were, from all natural considerations and motives and from the natural causality which rules them. 'Such independence, however, is called *freedom* in the strictest, i.e. transcendental, sense' (*Critique of Practical Reason*, bk 1, sect. 5). I am free in a radical sense, self-determining not as a natural being, but as a pure, moral will.

This is the central, exhilarating notion of Kant's ethics. Moral life is equivalent to freedom, in this radical sense of self-determination by the moral will. This is called 'autonomy'. Any deviation from it, any determination of the will by some external consideration; some inclination, even of the most joyful benevolence; some authority, even as high as God himself, is condemned as heteronomy. The moral subject must act not only rightly, but from the right motive, and the right motive can only be respect for the moral law itself, that moral law which he gives to himself as rational will.

This vision of moral life excited not only the exhilaration of freedom, but also a changed sentiment of piety or religious awe. In fact, the object of this sentiment shifted. The numinous which inspired awe was not God as much as the moral law itself, the self-given command of Reason. So that men were thought to come closest to the divine, to what commands unconditional respect, not when they worship but when they act in moral freedom.

But this austere and exciting doctrine exacts a price. Freedom is defined in contrast to inclination, and it is plain that Kant sees the moral life as a perpetual struggle, for man as a natural being must be dependent on nature, and hence have desires and inclinations which just because they depend on nature cannot be expected to dovetail with the demands of morality which have their utterly different source in pure reason (bk I, pt III, 149). But what is more, one has the uneasy sense that an ultimate peace between reason and inclination would be more of a loss than a gain; for what would become of freedom if there were no more contrast? Kant never really solved this problem, but he could avoid facing it the more easily in that he plainly believed that a state of holiness, as he called it, where the very possibility of a desire which would spur us to deviate from the moral law would no longer arise, was impossible in this vale of tears. He rather thought that we are faced with the endless task of struggling to approach perfection. But for his successors this became a point of acute tension. For they were strongly drawn both by Kant's radical freedom and by the expressive theory of man.

On reflection, this is not at all surprising; there were profound affinities between the two views. The expressive theory points us towards a fulfilment of man in freedom, which is precisely a freedom of self-determination, and not simply independence from external impingement. But the highest, purest, most uncompromising vision of self-determining freedom was Kant's. No wonder it turned the head of a whole generation. Fichte clearly poses the choice between two foundations for philosophy, one based on subjectivity and freedom, the other on objectivity and substance, and opts emphatically for the first. If man's fulfilment was to be that of a self-determining subject, and if subjectivity meant self-clarity, self-possession in reason, then the moral freedom to which Kant called us had to be seen as a summit.

But the lines of affinity run the other way too. Kantian freedom of self-determination called for completion; it must strive to overcome the boundaries in which it was set and become all-determining.

It cannot be satisfied with the limitations of an inner, spiritual freedom, but must try to impress its purpose on nature as well. It must become total. This is in any case how this seminal idea was experienced by the young generation which received Kant's critical writings in its formative period, and which was seized with enthusiasm for the idea, however older and wiser heads may have felt.

But along with this deep affinity between the two views which tended to draw the same people into their orbits, there was an obvious clash. Radical freedom seemed only possible at the cost of a diremption with nature, a division within myself between reason and sensibility more radical than anything the materialist, utilitarian Enlightenment had dreamed, and hence a division with external nature, from whose causal laws the free self must be radically independent, even while phenomenally his behaviour appeared to conform. The radically free subject was thrown back on himself, and it seemed on his individual self, in opposition to nature and external authority, and on to a decision in which others could have no share.

For young, and some not so young, intellectual Germans of the 1790s these two ideas, expression and radical freedom, took on a tremendous force. It was born partly no doubt of the changes in German society which made the need for a new identity to be felt all the more pressingly. But the force was multiplied many times by the sense that the old order was breaking and a new one was being born which arose from the impact of the French Revolution. The fact that this Revolution began after the Terror to arouse ambivalent feelings or even hostility among its erstwhile admirers did nothing to still the sense of urgency. On the contrary, there was a sense that a great transformation was both necessary and possible and this aroused hopes which at other times would have seemed extravagant. It was felt that a great breakthrough was imminent, and if because of the situation in Germany and the turn taken by the French Revolution this hope soon deserted the political sphere, it was all the more intense in the sphere of culture and human consciousness. And if France was the homeland of political revolution, where else but in Germany could the great spiritual revolution be accomplished?

The hope was that men would come to unite the two ideals, radical freedom and the expressive fullness. Because of the affinities between them mentioned above, it was almost inevitable that if either were deeply and powerfully felt, the other would be as well. Members of the older generation could remain aloof from one or

the other; thus Herder never warmed to the critical turn of Kant's thought; though the two had been close during Herder's time of study at Königsberg they became somewhat estranged in the 1780s. Herder saw in the transcendental exploration of Kant only another theory which divided the subject. Kant for his part was dismissive about Herder's philosophy of history, and seems to have felt little attraction to this powerful statement of the expressive theory.

But it was their successors, the generation of the 1790s to which Hegel belonged, who threw themselves into the task of uniting these two trends. This synthesis was the principal aim of the first Romantic generation of Fichte and Schelling, of the Schlegels, of Hölderlin, Novalis and Schleiermacher; even of older men who were not properly Romantics at all, notably Schiller.

The terms of the synthesis were variously identified. For the young Friedrich Schlegel the task was to unite Goethe and Fichte, the former's poetry representing the highest in beauty and harmony, the latter's philosophy being the fullest statement of the freedom and sublimity of the self. Others, such as Schleiermacher and Schelling, talked of uniting Kant and Spinoza.

But one of the most common ways of stating the problem was in terms of history, as a problem of uniting the greatest in ancient and modern life. We find this in Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, the young Hegel, Hölderlin and many others. The Greeks represented for many Germans of the late eighteenth century a paradigm of expressivist perfection. This is what helps to explain the immense enthusiasm for ancient Greece which reigned in Germany in the generation which followed Winckelmann. Ancient Greece had supposedly achieved the most perfect unity between nature and the highest human expressive form. To be human came naturally, as it were. But this beautiful unity died. And moreover, it had to, for this was the price of the development of reason to that higher stage of self-clarity which is essential to our realization as radically free beings. As Schiller put it (*Aesthetic Education of Man*, 6th letter, para. 11), the 'intellect was unavoidably compelled . . . to dissociate itself from feeling and intuition in an attempt to arrive at exact discursive understanding', and below (para. 12), 'If the manifold potentialities in man were ever to be developed, there was no other way but to pit them against each other.'

In other words the beautiful Greek synthesis had to die because man had to be inwardly divided in order to grow. In particular the growth of reason and hence radical freedom required a diremption

from the natural and sensible. Modern man had to be at war with himself. The sense that the perfection of the expressive model was not enough, that it would have to be united with radical freedom, was clearly marked in this picture of history by the realization that the loss of primal unity was inevitable and that return was impossible. The overpowering nostalgia for the lost beauty of Greece was kept from ever overflowing its bounds into a project of return.

The sacrifice had been necessary to develop man to his fullest self-consciousness and free self-determination. But although there was no hope of return, there was hope, once man had fully developed his reason and his faculties, of a higher synthesis in which both harmonious unity and full self-consciousness would be united. If the early Greek synthesis had been unreflective – and had to be, for reflection starts by dividing man within himself – then the new unity would fully incorporate the reflective consciousness gained, would indeed be brought about by this reflective consciousness. In the *Hyperion Fragment*, Hölderlin put it thus:

> There are two ideals of our existence: one is a condition of the greatest simplicity, where our needs accord with each other, with our powers and with everything we are related to, *just through the organization of nature*, without any action on our part. The other is a condition of the highest cultivation, where this accord would come about between infinitely diversified and strengthened needs and powers, *through the organization which we are able to give to ourselves.*

Man is called on to tread a path from the first of these conditions to the second.

This spiral vision of history, where we return not to our starting point but to a higher variant of unity, expressed at once the sense of opposition between the two ideals and the demand, flaming up to a hope, that the two be united. The prime tasks of thought and sensibility were seen as the overcoming of profound oppositions which had been necessary, but which now had to be surmounted. These were the oppositions which expressed most acutely the division between the two ideals of radical freedom and integral expression.

These were: the opposition between thought, reason and morality on one side, and desire and sensibility on the other; the opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom on one side, and life in the community on the other; the opposition between self-consciousness and communion with nature; and beyond this the separation of finite subjectivity from the infinite life that flowed through nature,

the barrier between the Kantian subject and the Spinozist substance.

How was this great reunification to be accomplished? How to combine the greatest moral autonomy with a fully restored communion with the great current of life within us and without? In the end, this goal is only attainable if we conceive of nature itself as having some sort of foundation in spirit. If the highest spiritual side of man, his moral freedom, is to come to more than passing and accidental harmony with his natural being, then nature itself has to tend to the spiritual.

As long as we think of nature in terms of blind forces or brute facts then it can never fuse with the rational, the autonomous in man. We must either choose capitulation, with naturalism, or content ourselves with an occasional, partial accord within ourselves, won by unremitting effort and constantly threatened by the massive presence of untransformed nature around us with which we are in constant, unavoidable interchange. If the aspirations to radical freedom and to integral expressive unity with nature are to be totally fulfilled together, if man is to be at one with nature in himself and in the cosmos while being most fully a self-determining subject, then it is necessary first that my basic natural inclination spontaneously be to morality and freedom; and more than this, since I am a dependent part of a larger order of nature, it is necessary that this whole order within me and without tend of itself towards spiritual goals, tend to realize a form in which it can unite with subjective freedom. If I am to remain a spiritual being and yet not be opposed to nature in my interchange with it, then this interchange must be a communion in which I enter into relation with some spiritual being or force.

But this is to say that spirituality, tending to realize spiritual goals, is of the essence of nature. Underlying natural reality is a spiritual principle striving to realize itself.

Now to posit a spiritual principle underlying nature comes close to positing a cosmic subject. And this becomes the foundation of a variety of the Romantic world-views, some of which came to expression in the evolving thought of the young Schelling.

But the mere positing of a cosmic subjectivity is not enough. Various pantheistic views, for instance, see the world as emanating from a spirit or soul. But pantheism cannot provide the basis for uniting autonomy and expressive unity.

For man is only an infinitesimal part of the divine life which flows through the whole of nature. Communion with the God of

nature could only mean yielding to the great current of life and abandoning radical autonomy. Hence the view of this generation, which it drew from Herder and Goethe, was not a simple pantheism but rather a variant of the Renaissance idea of man the microcosm. Man is not merely a part of the universe; in another way he reflects the whole: the spirit which expresses itself in the external reality of nature comes to conscious expression in man. This was the basis of Schelling's early philosophy, whose principle was that the creative life of nature and the creative power of thought were one.[1] Hence, as Hoffmeister points out, the two basic ideas which we see recurring in different forms from Goethe to the Romantics to Hegel: that we can really know nature only because we are of the same substance, that indeed we only properly know nature when we try to commune with it, not when we try to dominate or dissect it in order to subject it to the categories of analytic understanding;[2] and secondly, that we know nature because we are in a sense in contact with what made it, the spiritual force which expresses itself in nature.

But then what is our relation as finite spirits to this creative force which underlies all nature? What does it mean to say that it is one with the creative power of thought in us? Does it just mean that this is the power to reflect in consciousness the life which is already complete in nature? But then in what sense would this be compatible with radical freedom? Reason would not be an autonomous source of norms for us; rather our highest achievement would be to express faithfully a larger order to which we belong. If the aspiration to radical autonomy is to be saved, the microcosm idea has to be pushed further to the notion that human consciousness does not just reflect the order of nature but completes or perfects it. On this view, the cosmic spirit which unfolds in nature is striving to complete itself in conscious self-knowledge, and the locus of this self-consciousness is the mind of man.

Thus man does more than reflect a nature complete in itself; rather he is the vehicle whereby the cosmic spirit brings to completion a self-expression the first attempts at which lie before us in nature. Just as on the expressivist view man achieves his fulfilment in a form of life which is also an expression of self-awareness, so here the power underlying nature, as spirit, reaches its fullest expression in self-awareness. But this is not achieved in some

[1] J. Hoffmeister, *Goethe und der deutsche Idealismus* (Leipzig, 1932), 10.

[2] So Goethe: Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,
Die Sonne könnt' es nie erblicken;
Läg nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,
Wie könnt' uns Göttliches entzücken?

transcendent realm beyond man. If it were, then union with the cosmic spirit would require that man subordinate his will to a higher being, that he accept heteronomy. Rather spirit reaches this self-awareness in man.

So that while nature tends to realize spirit, that is, self-consciousness, man as a conscious being tends towards a grasp of nature in which he will see it as spirit and as one with his own spirit. In this process men come to a new understanding of self: they see themselves not just as individual fragments of the universe, but rather as vehicles of cosmic spirit. And hence men can achieve at once the greatest unity with nature, that is, with the spirit which unfolds itself in nature, *and* the fullest autonomous self-expression. The two must come together since man's basic identity is as vehicle of spirit.

A conception of cosmic spirit of this kind, if we can make sense of it, is the only one which can square the circle, as it were – which can provide the basis of a union between finite and cosmic spirit which meets the requirement that man be united to the whole and yet not sacrifice his own self-consciousness and autonomous will. And it was something of this kind which the generation of the Romantics was struggling towards, and which Schelling wanted to define in his notion of the identity between the creative life in nature and the creative force of thought, and in formulae like 'Nature is visible spirit, spirit invisible nature'.

Now it was a notion of this kind which Hegel in the end hammered out. Hegel's Spirit, or *Geist*, although he is often called 'God' and although Hegel claimed to be clarifying Christian theology, is not the God of traditional theism; he is not a God who could exist quite independently of men, even if men did not exist, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before the creation. On the contrary, he is a spirit who lives as spirit only through men. They are the vehicles, and the indispensable vehicles, of his spiritual existence, as consciousness, rationality, will. But at the same time *Geist* is not reducible to man; he is not identical with the human spirit, since he is also the spiritual reality underlying the universe as a whole, and as a spiritual being he has purposes and he realizes ends which cannot be attributed to finite spirits *qua* finite, but which finite spirits on the contrary serve. For the mature Hegel, man comes to himself in the end when he sees himself as the vehicle of a larger spirit.

For this point of view, Hegel's synthesis can be seen as a realization of the fundamental ambition of the Romantic generation. And this may seem a little surprising at first, since we rightly do not look

at Hegel as a Romantic. Rather we know him to be one of the sharpest critics of the Romantic generation.

But the paradox here can be rapidly dissipated. I would like to claim that this ambition of combining the fullest rational autonomy with the greatest expressive unity was also central to Hegel's philosophical endeavour. In this he was at one with his Romantic contemporaries. What separates them is that Hegel took a different path to reach this goal; and it is precisely this difference which makes his attempt to achieve this perhaps impossible synthesis the most impressive and continuingly fruitful of that time.

What separates Hegel from his Romantic contemporaries is his insistence that the synthesis be achieved through reason. For many thinkers of the Romantic generation this seemed an impossible demand. For reason was precisely that which analysed, which segmented reality in order to make it comprehensible. Rational thought seems inherently concerned to divide and to mark distinctions. In order to unite the finite with the infinite subject, it appeared more appropriate to place one's hope in intuition, in some immediate, synthesizing grasp of the whole; or to look for the expression of this renewed synthesis in art, rather than in the segmented discourse of philosophy (as Schelling appeared to do in one of his formulations).

If rational thought seemed an impossible medium for the synthesis of subject and whole, it seemed from another point of view an inadequate vehicle for subjective freedom as well. Surely it was too limiting. The rational maintains thought within certain fixed boundaries; the fullest realization of the infinite and boundless freedom of the subject was rather the untrammelled imagination, the capacity to stand back from any of its creations and transcend them with some further invention. Something of this underlay Friedrich Schlegel's notion of 'irony'; and the same endless fecundity of transformations seems to recur in Novalis' 'magical idealism'.

Hegel firmly rejected both these temptations to abandon reason. He sees clearly that to cede to them is to render the whole enterprise of a synthesis between freedom and expressive unity hopeless from the start. If our unity with the cosmic principle was to be achieved by abandoning reason, through some intuition inarticulable in rational terms, then we have in fact sacrificed the essential. For the full clarity of rational understanding is the essence of self-determining freedom, which obtains, after all, where pure reason gives the law. To achieve a unity with nature in pure intuition, one of which we can give no rational account, is to lose oneself in the great current of

life, and this is not a synthesis between autonomy and expression, but a capitulation in which we give up autonomy. It is indistinguishable from a return to the original unity which was broken by reflection, rather than being the higher synthesis to which the spiral ascends.

Or again, the idea that the freedom of the subject resides in some endlessly original creative power contradicts the requirements of a complete union of autonomy and expression of subjectivity and nature. A subjectivity which is inspired tirelessly to create new forms is one which by definition can never achieve integral expression, can never find a form which truly expresses itself. This Romantic ideal of infinite change is ultimately inspired by Fichte's philosophy of endless striving and shares the same inadequacy, which Hegel will castigate with the term 'bad infinity'.

This Romantic notion of Irony, Hegel will argue in his lectures on aesthetics,[1] denies the ultimate seriousness of any of the external expressions of spirit, all of which are of no significance before the endlessly creative 'I'. But this 'I' is at the same time seeking, indeed craves, external expression, and thus the triumphal self-affirmation of Irony gives way to the sense of loss, of longing (*Sehnsucht*),[2] to the withdrawal from the world as abandoned by spirit, which many Romantics experienced and which Hegel characterizes in the portrait of the 'beautiful soul'. On Hegel's view there is an inner link between the Romantic subject's claims to boundless creativity and his experience of the world as God-forsaken, which Hegel constantly combats in the name of his own vision of the rationality of the real.

In a sense we could argue that this desertion of reason accounts for the oscillation of Romantic thought between a semi-pantheistic abandonment in communion with nature, history or God on one extreme, and an acute sense of the solitary fate of the subject in a God-forsaken world on the other. Hegel will strongly attack both manifestations.

But to have shown that the Romantic solution isn't viable is not to have solved the problem. On the contrary, these reflections might easily make one despair of achieving the synthesis, since if Hegel's objections to the Romantics' abandonment of reason seem cogent, their original objections against reason still seem telling.

But Hegel undertakes to answer these objections; and his struggles with them emerge in some of the important and recurring themes of his work. The demands of freedom as infinite activity on one hand,

[1] *Die Idee und das Ideal*, 95–102. [2] Ibid. 99.

and as ordered by reason on the other, are reconciled in his conception of infinity, which incorporates the finite, and which returns on itself like a circle.

And the clash between reason as analytic and divisive and the demands of expressive unity gives rise to Hegel's distinction between understanding and reason. 'Understanding' for Hegel has all the features attributed to rationality in the Romantic polemic; it distinguishes and divides. But 'Reason' is a higher mode of thought which somehow sets all these distinctions back in movement again and brings us to the over-arching unity.

Hegel's solution here is to agree that rationality involves a clear consciousness of distinctions: between subject and object, self and other, the rational and the affective. But he will meet the Romantic objection by insisting that the ultimate synthesis must incorporate division as well as unity. In the language of the *Differenz* of 1801, 'the Absolute . . . is the identity of identity and non-identity; opposition and unity are both together in it' (77).

But one might be tempted to ask, how is this a solution? It seems indistinguishable from an admission that the problem is insoluble. What does it mean to combine opposition and unity? Is Hegel just juggling with words here to make the unthinkable look as though it were necessarily true, as some of his hostile critics have maintained? In order to answer this we must now turn to look at the main lines of Hegel's philosophical synthesis.

2. THE EMBODIED SUBJECT

As an attempt to realize the synthesis between rational autonomy and expressive unity, Hegel's work aims to overcome the oppositions in which these two terms in one form or another stand over against each other, such as the opposition in us between freedom and nature, or that between individual and society; the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the knowing subject and his world, or the even more unbridgeable one between finite and infinite spirit, man and God.

In keeping with the spiral view of history mentioned in the last section, Hegel holds that each of these oppositions becomes initially sharper as man develops; but that when they reach their fullest development the terms come to reconciliation of themselves. And 'reconciliation' doesn't mean simply 'undoing'; there is no question of returning to our primitive condition before the separation of subject and nature. On the contrary, the aspiration is to retain the

fruits of separation, free rational consciousness, while reconciling this with unity, that is, with nature, society, God, and even with fate or the course of things.

This is the more necessary in that philosophy plays a crucial, indeed an indispensable, role in revealing this reconciliation, in bringing it to consciousness; and hence also in realizing it, because in this case, realization and self-consciousness cannot be separated, as we shall see more fully later on.

But how can these oppositions be reconciled when each term only comes to be when in opposition to its other? For this is in fact our problem. Man only attains his self-conscious, rational autonomy in separating off from nature, society, God and fate; he only wins through to inner freedom by disciplining natural impulse in himself, breaking from the unthinking bent of social custom, challenging the authority of God and sovereign, refusing to accept the decrees of fate. And Hegel sees this very clearly, which is why he repudiates any attempt simply to undo the oppositions and return to primitive unity.

Hegel's answer is that each term in these basic dichotomies, when thoroughly understood, shows itself to be not only opposed to but identical with its opposite. And when we examine things more deeply we shall see that this is so because at base the very relations of opposition and identity are inseparably linked to each other. They cannot be utterly distinguished because neither can exist on its own, that is, maintain itself as the sole relation holding between a given pair of terms. Rather they are in a kind of circular relation. An opposition arises out of an earlier identity, and this of necessity; the identity could not sustain itself on its own, but had to breed opposition. And from this it follows that the opposition is not simply opposition; the relation of each term to its opposite is a peculiarly intimate one. It is not just related to an other but to *its* other, and this hidden identity will necessarily reassert itself in a recovery of unity.

That is why Hegel holds that the ordinary viewpoint of identity has to be abandoned in philosophy in favour of a way of thinking which can be called dialectical in that it presents us with something which cannot be grasped in a single proposition or series of propositions, which does not violate the principle of non-contradiction: $-(p \cdot -p)$. The minimum cluster which can really do justice to reality is three propositions, that A is A, that A is also –A; and that –A shows itself to be after all A.

Hegel claims that to grasp this truth of speculation is to see how

free subjectivity overcomes its opposition to nature, society, God and fate. This is a rather staggering thesis. So much of moment to man seems to ride on what looks very much at first verbal legerdemain. What does it mean to play fast and loose with 'identity' and 'opposition', 'identity' and 'difference'? What exactly does the thesis assert, and how does one back it up?

In order to see what Hegel is talking about here we have to understand his notion of *Geist*, or cosmic spirit. What seems bizarre in the abstract, when we talk of 'identity' and 'difference' *tout court*, may seem less so when we apply it to *Geist*. Now the basic model for infinite spirit is provided for the mature Hegel by the subject.

Before seeing how this term applies to *Geist* it is worth examining what Hegel's notion of subject was. And this is the more worth while in that his notion is important philosophically in its own right, that is, as a conception of the human subject which breaks with the dualism which had become dominant in philosophy since Descartes among both rationalists and empiricists.[1]

Hegel's conception builds on the expressivist theory, which was developed by Herder and others. As we saw, this brought back Aristotelian categories in which we see the subject, man, as realizing a certain form; but it also added another dimension in that it looks on this realized form as the expression, in the sense of clarification, of what the subject is, something which could not be known in advance. It is the marriage of these two models, of Aristotelian form and modern expression, which enables us to speak here of *self*-realization.

Hegel's theory of the subject was a theory of self-realization. And as such it was radically anti-dualist. For this expressivist theory is opposed to the dualism of post-Cartesian philosophy (including empiricism), and that on both sides of its ancestry. This dualism saw the subject as a centre of consciousness, perceiving the outside world and itself; which centre was immaterial, and so heterogeneous from the world of body, including the subject's own body. The 'spiritual' functions of thought, perception, understanding etc. are attributed to this non-material being. And this 'mind' is sometimes thought of as perfectly self-transparent, that is, able to see clearly its own contents or 'ideas' (this seems to have been Descartes's view).

Now first, this view leaves no place for life as understood in the

[1] Hegel is in fact one of the important links in a chain of thought in modern philosophical anthropology, one which is opposed to both dualism and mechanism, and which we see continued in different ways in Marxism and modern phenomenology.

Aristotelian tradition – life as a self-organizing, self-maintaining form, which can only operate in and therefore is inseparable from its material embodiment. This kind of life disappears in dualism, since its whole nature is to straddle the gap dualism opens. It is material, and yet in the maintenance of form it exhibits the kind of purposiveness and even sometimes intelligence which we associate with mind. We feel tempted to think of living things as 'taking account' of their surroundings precisely because of the intelligent adaptation which they can make to novel situations.

Dualism on the other hand attributes all these functions of intelligence to a mind which is heterogeneous from body, so that matter is left as something which is to be understood purely mechanistically. In this way, Cartesian–empiricist dualism has an important link with mechanism. Descartes tended to give mechanistic explanations of physiology, and modern mechanistic psychology is closely affiliated historically to empiricism; it is dualism with one term suppressed.

But the modern temptation to dualism arises in a very different philosophical climate from Aristotle's. It is fed in part by a notion of the will which comes to us from Judaeo-Christian roots and is foreign to Greek thought; it grows with the modern idea of a self-defining subject. In short it is bound up with the modern preoccupations with pure rationality and radical freedom. And as we saw, Hegel has no desire to sweep these aside and return to an earlier phase.

And it is in fact when we focus on pure thought, on the reflective activity of the mind when it is pondering some problem in science or mathematics, when it is deliberating on some principle of morals, that the mind seems to be freest from external control – in a way it does not appear to be, for instance, in our emotional life. It is in this realm that the thesis of dualism seems to be most plausible. While I might hesitate to locate my rage at the enemy, which I can 'feel' in my body, in some disembodied haven, where else can I place my purely inner reflections on a problem in logic, or a question of moral conduct?

This is where the other aspect of expressive theory becomes relevant. It need not surprise us that Herder developed an expressive theory of language along with, and indeed as an essential part of, the expressive theory of man. On this theory words have meaning not simply because they come to be used to point or refer to certain things in the world or in the mind, but more fundamentally because they express or embody a certain kind of consciousness of ourselves and things, peculiar to man as a language-user, for which Herder

used the word 'reflectiveness' (*Besonnenheit*). Language is seen not just as a set of signs, but as the medium of expression of a certain way of seeing and experiencing; as such it is continuous with art. Hence there can be no thought without language; and indeed the languages of different peoples reflect their different visions of things.

Hence this theory of expression is also anti-dualist. There is no thought without language, art, gesture or some external medium. And thought is inseparable from its medium, not just in the sense that the former could not be without the latter, but also in that thought is shaped by its medium. That is, what from one point of view might be described as the same thoughts are altered, given a new twist, in being expressed in a new medium, for instance translated from one language to another. To put the point in another way, we cannot clearly distinguish the content of a thought from what is 'added' by the medium.

Thus where the Aristotelian conception of the relation of matter and form, or hylomorphism, as it has been called, gives a notion of living beings in which soul is inseparable from body, so this theory of expression gives us a view of thinking beings in which thought is inseparable from its medium. And hence it takes just those functions – pure thought, reflection, deliberation – which one would be most tempted to attribute to a disembodied mind, and reclaims them for embodied existence as necessarily couched in an external medium.

Thus expressivist theory as a marriage of hylomorphism and the new view of expression is radically anti-dualistic. And so was Hegel's theory of the subject. It was a basic principle of Hegel's thought that the subject and all his functions, however 'spiritual', were inescapably embodied; and this in two related dimensions: as a 'rational animal', that is, a living being who thinks; and as an expressive being, that is, a being whose thinking always and necessarily expresses itself in a medium.

This principle of necessary embodiment, as we may call it, is central to Hegel's conception of *Geist*, or cosmic spirit. But before we go on to look at this notion of *Geist*, let us see how this expressivist theory of the subject already gives us some basis for speaking of a unity of identity and opposition.

Hegel's expressive theory does not see the hiatus between life and consciousness which we find in Cartesian–empiricist dualism. For the latter, the vital functions are relegated to the world of extended, material being, and are to be understood mechanistically; while the functions of mind belong to a separate, non-material

entity. Hence Descartes could look on animals as complicated machines. But for any follower of Aristotle, this kind of dichotomy is untenable. For a living thing is a functioning unity and not just a concatenation of parts. Moreover, in maintaining a certain form through changing conditions it shows a sort of proto-purpose, and even a sort of proto-intelligence in adapting to novel circumstances, akin to what self-conscious beings show in explicit form in their striving for goals and their ability to take account of self and surroundings in doing so. The living thing is, in other words, not just a functioning unity, but also something in the nature of an agent; and this places it in a line of development which reaches its apex in the human subject.

In this way Hegel restored the sense of the continuity of living things which was damaged by Cartesianism. But there is not just continuity between ourselves and animals; there is also continuity within ourselves between vital and mental functions, life and consciousness. On an expressivist view these cannot be separated out and attributed to two parts, or faculties, in man. Hegel agrees with Herder that we can never understand man as an animal with rationality added; on the contrary, he is a quite different kind of totality, in which the fact of reflective consciousness leaves nothing else unaltered; the feelings, desires, even the instinct for self-preservation of a reflective being must be different from those of other animals, not to speak of his bearing, bodily structure, the ills he is subject to, and so on. There is no other way of looking at things for anyone who sees living beings as totalities.

This view thus asserts not only a continuity of living things, but also qualitative discontinuities between them. Man as a living being is not radically different from other animals, but at the same time he is not just an animal plus reason; he is a quite new totality; and that means he has to be understood on quite different principles. Hence along with the idea of continuity we have that of a hierarchy of levels of being. We can speak of a hierarchy here and not just different types, because the 'higher' ones can be seen as realizing to a greater degree what the lower ones embody imperfectly.

Hegel holds to such a hierarchy of being which reaches its apex in conscious subjectivity. Lower kinds of life exhibit proto-forms, as it were, of subjectivity; for they show in ascending degree purpose, self-maintenance as life forms, knowledge of what surrounds them. They become in short more and more like agents, and the highest animals only want the power of expression to be selves. Hegel extends this hierarchy, as we shall see later, beyond living beings to

the whole of creation. We can see a hierarchy among inanimate phenomena which points to the higher stage of life, just as animals point beyond to human subjectivity. Thus just as the living is a proto-form of consciousness, so the unity of, say, the solar system is to be seen as a proto-form of the living.

So far, Hegel's theory is not very different from that of other expressivist thinkers, Herder for instance. But he also builds into it a contribution from Kantian idealism. Consciousness is not only continuous/discontinuous with life in the way described, it also in a sense 'negates' life. For man as a conscious, knowing, rational being aims as we saw at a clarity and self-sufficiency of rational thought which he only attains by separating himself from nature, not only without but also within. Hence he is induced to separate rational thought, to insulate it as it were, from his desires, leanings and affinities; to try to free it as much as possible from the unconscious drift of inclination. Rational consciousness has a vocation to divide man, to oppose itself to life, and it is this of course which finds expression, *inter alia*, in the theory of Cartesian dualism.

Man is thus inescapably at odds with himself. He is a rational animal, which means a living, thinking being; and he can only be a thinking being because he is alive. And yet the exigencies of thinking carry him into opposition to life, to the spontaneous and natural in him; so that he is led to divide himself, to create a distinction and a discord within himself where originally there was unity.

Developed rationality and hence discord is not something man starts with, but something he comes to. And this means two things: first, beyond the hierarchy of forms of life, there is a hierarchy of modes of thought. As man's rational consciousness of himself grows, so his mode of expression of this self-consciousness must alter. His language, art, religion and philosophy must change; for thought cannot alter without a transformation of its medium. Thus there must be a hierarchy of modes of expression in which the higher make possible a more exact, lucid and coherent thought than the lower.

The concept of a hierarchy of this kind plays an important role in Hegel's thought. It is best known in connection with the distinction between art, religion and philosophy. These are vehicles for understanding Spirit, but they are of unequal rank. In a sense we express the same truths in these three modes, only at different levels of adequacy; which is like the other kind of hierarchy where the lower levels contain proto-forms of the higher, that is, they exhibit an impoverished version of the same kind of unity.

Secondly, the fact that rationality is something man achieves rather than starts with means that man has a history. In order to come to clarity man has to work his way with effort and struggle through the various stages of lesser, more distorted consciousness. He starts as a primitive being and has to acquire culture and understanding painfully and slowly. And this is not an accidental misfortune. For thought or reason can only exist embodied in a living being, as we have seen. But the processes of life itself are unconscious and dominated by unreflecting impulse. To realize the potential of conscious life therefore requires effort, internal division and transformation over time. We can thus see that this transformation over time involves more than the ascent up a hierarchy of modes of consciousness. It requires also that man struggle with impulse and give a shape to his life which moulds impulse into a culture which can express the demands of rationality and freedom. Human history is thus also the ascent up a ladder of cultural forms.

Perhaps we can now cast some light on the puzzling claims made at the end of the last section, that identity and opposition are linked, that they can hold of the same pair of terms. Hegel's notion of the subject begins to make sense of this.

The thinking rational subject can only exist embodied. In this sense we can truly say that the subject is his embodiment, that for example I as a thinking being am my living body. And yet at the same time this embodiment in life has a tendency to carry us along the stream of inclination, of impulse towards unreflecting unity within ourselves and with nature. Reason has to struggle against this in order to realize itself. And in this sense his embodiment is not only other than the thinking rational subject, but in a sense his opposite, his limit, his opponent.

Thus we can say that the subject is both identical with and opposed to his embodiment. This can be because the subject is not defined by Hegel in one dimension, as it were, as a being with certain properties, but in two. He has certain conditions of existence, those of embodiment; but at the same time the subject is characterized teleologically, as tending towards a certain perfection, that of reason and freedom, and this is in line with both Aristotle and expressivist theory. And the demands of this perfection run counter, at least at first, to his conditions of existence.

It is this inner complexity which makes possible the subject's relation to its self/other. In order to be at all as a conscious being, the subject must be embodied in life; but in order to realize the perfection of consciousness it must fight and overcome the natural

bent of life as a limit. The conditions of its existence are in conflict with the demands of its perfection; and yet for it to exist is to seek perfection. The subject is thus necessarily the sphere of inner conflict, or may we even say, of contradiction? Hegel did not hesitate.

Thus both relations, identity and opposition, can be said to hold together. But since one is founded on the unchanging conditions of existence, while the other comes from the requirements of the subject's realization which it achieves over time, we can think of the two relations as linked in a temporal pattern. Primitive identity must give way to division, which inevitably arises since the subject cannot but contain the seed of division within himself.

But how about the third stage in this temporal pattern, the reconciliation? I said at the end of the last section that Hegel held that opposition fully understood shows the recovery of unity. And this too can be seen in Hegel's theory of the subject. Man does not remain for ever at the stage of opposition between thought and life, reason and nature. On the contrary, both terms are transformed to come to higher unity. Raw nature, the life of impulse, is made over, cultivated, so as to reflect the higher aspirations of man, to be an expression of reason. And reason, on its side, ceases to identify itself narrowly with a supposedly higher self fighting to hold nature at bay. On the contrary, it sees that nature itself is part of a rational plan, that division had to be in order to prepare and cultivate man for a higher union. The rational subject identifies himself with this larger reason, the rational plan underlying the whole, and as such no longer sees himself as opposed to a nature which has itself been transformed to be an apt expression of rationality.

Human history thus does not end with division. It moves beyond it to a still higher cultural form, in which our nature, that is, our individual and collective life in interchange with our surroundings, expresses a larger rational plan than that of the autonomous individual; and to a still higher mode of consciousness in which we come to see this larger plan and identify with it. Hegel reserves the term 'reason' (*Vernunft*) for this higher mode, and calls the vision of things as divided or opposed 'understanding' (*Verstand*).

This unity is very different from the undifferentiated one of the beginning. It is 'mediated'; it preserves the consciousness of division which was a necessary stage in the cultivation of nature and the development of reason. It is fully conscious, and (supposedly) quintessentially rational.

Thus the human subject models Hegel's thesis of the relation of

identity and opposition. Not only is he both identical and opposed to his essential embodiment; but this dual relation can be expressed in a temporal pattern: out of original identity, opposition necessarily grows; and this opposition itself leads to a higher unity, which is founded on a recognition of the inevitability and rational necessity of this opposition.

3. THE ABSOLUTE AS SUBJECT

But how does this theory of man justify such startling formulae as the 'identity of identity and non-identity'? Even if we grant that Hegel's theory of the subject gives us insight into an inescapable conflict in man, which we might be tempted to call a 'contradiction', how does this justify talking about a link between identity and opposition *tout court*?

The answer is that this theory of the subject applies not only to man, but to cosmic spirit or *Geist* as well. And indeed, we already saw at the end of the last section that the resolution of opposition in man required that we refer beyond him to a larger rational plan, which is that of *Geist*.

Now for Hegel, the Absolute is subject. That which underlies and manifests itself in all reality, what for Spinoza was 'substance', and came for those inspired by the *Sturm und Drang* to be seen as a divine life flowing through everything, Hegel understood as Spirit. But spirit or subjectivity is necessarily embodied. Hence *Geist* or God cannot exist separately from the universe which he sustains and in which he manifests himself. On the contrary this universe is his embodiment, without which he would not be, any more than I would be without mine. We can already see why Hegel had to suffer accusations of Spinozism or pantheism. And in this he was in the company of many other thinkers of the period who had been influenced by the *Sturm und Drang* or Romantic thought. In order to appreciate his reply, we have to examine more closely his conception of *Geist*, which was indeed peculiar to him.

We saw that there are two models of embodiment which come together in the expressivist theory of the subject on which Hegel built. One was the Aristotelian-derived notion of a life form which can only be in a living body. The other is that of the expression of thought which requires a medium. They come together in the notion of a mode of life which properly expresses what I am as a man, or more appropriately from an expressivist point of view, as *this* man, member of *this* community. The mode of living is both a

way of carrying out the necessary functions of life, nourishment, reproduction and so on, and also a cultural expression which reveals and determines what we are, our 'identity'. The marriage relation of a couple, the mode of economic production of a society, can – from an expressivist point of view, must – be seen in these two dimensions. They are modes of interchange which sustain life and reproduction. But they also incorporate definitions of role, of value, of aspiration, success and failure, fairness and so on. And there could not be anything which we would recognize as a human marriage, or mode of production, which did not incorporate such definitions. Or to put it another way, these relations would be impossible without language.

But although these two dimensions of embodiment are necessary to understand man, they do not overlap totally. There are aspects of man which we must understand simply as life-function, and not cultural expression – his digestion for instance; and we can argue, at any rate, that there are cultural expressions which can be understood without relating them to life-functions (though Marxists and Freudians would disagree). And these have to be set alongside marriage customs or modes of production, which must be understood as both.

With *Geist*, however, the two coincide perfectly. The universe is the embodiment of the totality of the 'life-functions' of God, that is, the conditions of his existence. And it also is throughout an expression of God, that is, something posited by God in order to manifest what he is. The universe must therefore both be grasped as something analogous to a life form, hence understood by the Aristotelian-derived category of 'internal teleology'; and it must be read as something analogous to a text in which God says what he is.

This perfect coincidence in God of life and expression is what marks him off as infinite spirit from ourselves as finite spirits. We must see the universe as the conditions of existence of God, and also as posited as such. God can be thought of as positing the conditions of his own existence. In this sense the universe can be looked at as if it were designed, as long as we take care to set aside the image of a designer who could exist separately from his creation. The universe has, we might say, a necessary structure. Before we go on to look at this difficult notion of a designed universe without an independent designer, let us see the shape of this necessary structure.

If the universe is posited as the conditions of existence of God or *Geist*, then we can deduce its general structure from the nature of *Geist*. Now *Geist* or subjectivity, as we saw, is to be understood

teleologically as tending to realize reason and freedom and self-consciousness, or rational self-awareness in freedom. We can see how these three terms are linked together in an expressivist theory of the subject. Rational self-awareness is rational awareness of a self which has been expressed in life and thus made determinate. The fullness of self-awareness is reached when this expression is recognized as adequate to the self. If it is not, if it is seen as truncated or distorted and requiring further change, then the self-awareness is not complete, however lucid the perception of inadequacy, for on the expressivist view what we really are is not known in advance of its expression. The truncated being can only go on to a fuller expression in order then to recognize what he really is.

But freedom, on the expressivist view, is the condition in which the self is adequately expressed. Hence full self-awareness is impossible without freedom. If we add to this the notion that self-awareness is of the essence of the subject, then the converse proposition is also true; freedom (that is, full self-expression) is impossible without self-awareness. Now Hegel would add to this common basis of expressivist theory the thesis that the essence of subjectivity is rational self-awareness, that self-consciousness must be in the clear medium of conceptual thought and not in cloudy intuition or ineffable vision. Hence rationality, too, is for him a condition of integral expression or freedom, and reciprocally.

Now let us transfer this from man on to *Geist*, and see what it shows us about the necessary structures of the world. If *Geist* as subject is to come to rational self-awareness in freedom, then the universe must contain, first, finite spirits. *Geist* must be embodied. But bodily reality is external reality, it is *partes extra partes*, extended in space and time. Hence for consciousness to be it must be located; it must be somewhere, sometime. But if a consciousness is somewhere, sometime, it is not somewhere else, sometime else. It thus has a limit between itself and what is not itself. It is finite.

We can thus show the necessity of finite spirit from the requirement that *Geist* be embodied, and from the nature of embodiment in external, spatio-temporal reality. But there is also another argument, which Hegel frequently employs, from the requirements of consciousness itself. Hegel took over the notion from Kant and Fichte that consciousness is necessarily bipolar, that it requires the distinction of subject and object. This plays an important role in Kant's transcendental deduction, which in one form turns on the requirement of objectivity, that is, that there be a distinction between phenomena which are bound together merely in my experience and those which

are bound together universally and necessarily. The extraordinary achievement of Kant's first *Critique* is to rehabilitate this distinction between subjective and objective *within* experience considered as distinct from things in themselves. This necessity of an objective pole to experience also underlies Kant's refutation of idealism.

Fichte took up the same principle. The ego posits the non-ego because this is the condition of consciousness. Hegel makes this principle his own, and it is part of his general espousal of the view that rational awareness requires separation. Consciousness is only possible when the subject is set over against an object. But to be set over against an object is to be limited by something other, and hence to be finite. It follows that if cosmic spirit is to attain full awareness, it can only be through vehicles which are finite spirits. Hence finite, limited subjects are necessary. The notion of a cosmic spirit which would be aware of itself directly, without the opposition to an object which is the predicament of finite subjects, is incoherent. The life of such a spirit would at best be one of dull self-feeling; there would be nothing in it which merited the name 'consciousness', much less 'rational awareness'. A fitting pantheist vision for the Romantic enthusiasts of intuition, but nothing to do with Hegel's *Geist.*

Geist is thus necessarily embodied in finite spirits. This is the same in the context of this argument as the thesis that *Geist* returns to himself out of opposition and division; or that his self-consciousness incorporates consciousness. And Hegel frequently does use the word 'consciousness' to refer to this bipolar dimension in the life of *Geist.*[1] And he will reject any theory of man which tries to avoid this bipolarity, any theory of consciousness as culminating in self-coincidence.[2]

Thus *Geist* must have a vehicle in finite spirit. This is the only kind of vehicle it can have. Moreover, there cannot be only one such. For *Geist* cannot be confined to the particular place and time of any one finite spirit. It has to compensate for its necessary localization, as it were, by living through many finite spirits.

Geist must thus embody itself in finite beings, in certain parcels of the universe. And these must be such that they can embody spirit. They must be living beings, for only living beings are capable of expressive activity, of deploying an external medium – sound, gesture, marks or whatever – in which meaning can be expressed;

[1] As, for instance, in the divisions of the *PhG.*

[2] Or as he puts it, the notion that I = I, a formulation which shows the Fichtean background of his reflections on this subject.

and only beings capable of expressive activity can embody spirit. Hence we can see that if *Geist* is to be, the universe must contain rational selves.

There are finite spirits, who must be living beings, hence finite living beings. Finite living beings are in interchange with a world outside them. Thus the universe must also contain a plurality of kinds of living things, as well as inanimate nature. Other species and inanimate nature are necessary as the background and foundation on which finite life can exist. But one can perhaps discern another argument in Hegel in favour of the necessary existence of many species and inanimate nature. *Geist* to be embodied requires, as we saw, externality, that is, extension in space and time, life, and conscious life. All of these, of course, exist in man. But a universe in which only finite conscious spirits existed, and lived purely in interchange with each other, would not be anything like as rich and varied as one in which life also existed on its own without consciousness, and externality was there on its own without both in the form of inanimate nature. The richest universe is one in which all these levels (and others, which Hegel distinguishes within inanimate nature in his philosophy of nature) exist on their own.

It may seem odd to see this Leibnizian principle, that the real world be the richest possible, recur in Hegel. But in fact it can be grounded on his own position. The universe, as we saw, is at once the embodiment, the realization of the conditions of existence, of *Geist*, and its expression, a statement of what *Geist* is. In this latter respect, there is no doubt about the superiority of a world in which the differences are maximally deployed. It is fuller, clearer as a statement.[1]

The general structure of the universe (about which only the barest indications have been given here; the detail is worked out in the Philosophies of Nature and Spirit) is thus determined by virtue of its being the embodiment and expression of *Geist*. It includes a hierarchy of beings from the lowest inanimate forms through various kinds of living species to man. And then, of course, for the realization of *Geist*, man has to develop, as we saw in the last section. So that there is also a hierarchy of cultural forms and modes of consciousness which succeed each other in time and make up

[1] Cf. Hegel's assertion about the external articulation of the universe at the very end of the Logic, the point of transition to the Philosophy of Nature. The Idea, as freedom, also leaves its embodiment 'free'. It is not embodied in an external reality which it controls tightly but which is left to develop to the full limit of externality, right up to 'the exteriority of space and time, existing absolutely for itself without subjectivity' (*WL*, II, 505).

human history. The articulation of the universe in space and time can be deduced from the requirements of a cosmic spirit which must be embodied and expressed in it. Even the different stages of human history can be derived as necessary, from the nature of man's starting point in raw, uncultivated existence and the consummation he is heading towards.[1]

What is it then for *Geist* to come to rational self-awareness in freedom? If the structure of the universe is as it is in order to be the embodiment/expression of *Geist*, then *Geist* comes to self-awareness when this is recognized. Of course, this can only be recognized by ourselves, finite spirits, for we are the only vehicles of awareness. But in recognizing that this is the structure of things we at the same time shift the centre of gravity of our own identity. We see that what is most fundamental about us is that we are vehicles of *Geist*. Hence in achieving full insight our science of the universe is transformed; from being knowledge that we as finite spirits have about a world which is other than us it becomes the self-knowledge of universal spirit of which we are the vehicles.

And in coming to full self-awareness *Geist* has also come to its fullest self-expression, hence freedom. It has shaped its vehicle to a perfect expression of itself. And since the essence of that vehicle, man, is to be the vehicle of *Geist*, he too is and knows himself as fully self-expressed, that is, free.

But the self-expression and self-awareness of *Geist* is something infinitely higher than our own. When man comes to full awareness of his perfect self-expression, he recognizes in this something which is ultimately given. Human nature, what is common to all men, is there as a basis or determinable which circumscribes the field for every man's original creation. And even my original creations, the things in my life that seem to express me as against man in general, even these seem to come to me as inspiration which I cannot fully

[1] Hegel missed a trick in not espousing a theory of evolution a half-century before Darwin. Instead he holds that while human culture has a sequential development, the whole order of things in nature, including animal species, does not. The linked ascending order of things in nature is to be understood not temporally as with historical forms, but timelessly. Hegel's reason for making this distinction, that only Spirit can have a history, sounds 'Hegelian' enough. But in fact he could have found grounds for accepting a theory of evolution if he had believed it to be true on other grounds. Indeed, if anything, it fits better, in that all transitions in the Philosophy of Nature could have been temporal as well. This is another example of how Hegel's philosophy of nature was dependent on (his understanding of) the science of his time as well as on other writers in the same field like Schelling, while his philosophies of man and history struck out beyond all contemporaries.

fathom, much less control. That is why, as we saw, not all of human life can be seen as expression; but much of what we do and what goes on in us must be understood purely in terms of our life form, just as we do with animals with no power of expression. And even our expressive activity is conditioned by this life form.

With *Geist* it is meant to be different. Its whole embodiment is supposed to be an expression of it as well. The universe, as this embodiment, is thought to be posited by *Geist*. *Geist* posits its own embodiment. Hence there can be nothing merely given. I as a human being have the vocation of realizing a nature which is given: and even if I am called on to be original, to realize myself in the way uniquely suited to myself, nevertheless this scope for originality is itself given as an integral part of human nature, as are those unique features of me on which my originality builds. Freedom for man thus means the free realization of a vocation which is largely given. But *Geist* should be free in a radical sense. What it realizes and recognizes as having been realized is not given, but determined by itself.

Hegel's *Geist* thus seems to be the original existentialist, choosing his own nature in radical freedom from anything merely given. And in fact Hegel laid the conceptual groundwork for all the modern views called 'existentialist', from Kierkegaard to Sartre. But Hegel himself was no existentialist. On the contrary, it is hard to see how Hegel's *Geist* could ever have begun, how he ever could have chosen one world rather than another, if we were to understand his radical freedom in the existentialist sense. For he would not start with a situation as does the human agent.

But for Hegel the radical freedom of *Geist* is not incompatible with a necessary structure of things; on the contrary, the two notions are intrinsically linked. *Geist* in positing the world is bound by rational necessity, the necessary structure of things if *Geist* is to be. But this is no limit on his freedom. For *Geist* as subjectivity is quintessentially reason. And reason is most fully realized when one follows in thought and action the line of rational, that is, conceptual, necessity. If one had a line of action which was grounded entirely on rational, conceptual necessity, without reposing on any merely given premises, then we would have a pure expression of subjectivity as reason, one in which Spirit would recognize itself as expressed, and hence free, in a total, unadulterated way; something immeasurably greater than the freedom of finite spirits. This is the freedom of *Geist*, which posits a world as its own essential embodiment according to rational necessity.

But there seems to be something amiss here. Can there be a line of action which is founded entirely on rational necessity? Surely there must be some goal which is taken as the starting point, even if everything that is done is determined by strict reasoning from this basic aim. For otherwise how can reasoning by itself come to any conclusion as to what action to take? But then is this basic goal not simply given?

The answer is, in a sense, yes. But not in a sense which need negate the radical freedom of *Geist*. For *Geist* can be thought to have as its basic aim simply that Spirit, or rational subjectivity, be; and the rest can be thought to follow of necessity. If the principle of embodiment, which has so far just been stated here without argument, could be shown to be necessarily true; if the arguments which I briefly sketched above from the principle of embodiment to the existence of finite spirits, living things, inanimate nature etc. hold, then the design of the universe could be shown to flow of necessity from the single basic goal: that rational subjectivity be. We could show, in other words, that if a subjectivity which knows itself rationally, that is, in conceptual consciousness, is to be, then all this is necessary.

But then the only input into this skein of rational necessity would be the goal, let rational subjectivity be. Once this 'decision' is taken, the rest flows of itself. But it cannot be thought of as a limitation on the freedom of *Geist* that this 'decision' is preformed. That subjectivity should be is not a limit on its freedom, but the very basis of it; and that it should be rational – expressed in conceptual consciousness – is thought by Hegel to belong to the very essence of subjectivity. For what do we mean by subjectivity if we do not include consciousness, self-consciousness and the power to act knowingly? But consciousness, knowledge, can only reach completion in conceptual thought.

Hence once we start with the basic goal that rational subjectivity be, which is no limit on the freedom of *Geist*, the fact that from then on *Geist*'s 'activity' in positing the world follows entirely the line of rational necessity is not a restriction on his freedom. Quite the contrary, it is just that which makes him radically free, in an unlimited, and so infinite, way. Because as a rational subjectivity he is following nothing but his own essence in following rational necessity. There is no outside element, no given which determines him. If the basic structure of the world were shown to be contingent,[1]

[1] We must stress here that it is a matter of the basic structure. Hegel does not hold that the world has no contingency in detail, as it were. On the contrary, there is

then something else other than rational necessity, that is, the very essence of rational subjectivity, would have determined it to be A rather than B. But then it would not be integrally an expression of the essence of this subjectivity and he would not be infinitely free.

But because everything that is flows by rational necessity out of the first 'decision', we cannot really say that *Geist* is faced with any givens. We can see this by contrasting his lot once more with ours. Man has a nature which is given; it is a fact about the world, along with a great number of others, that we have sexual desire all the time and not periodically like animals, that we can only live within certain temperature ranges etc. Freedom for us involves assuming this nature and innovating within the range of originality it allows. But for *Geist* nothing is given in this sense, that is, as a brute fact. The only starting point is the requirement that subjectivity be; and the only 'positive' content attached to this subjectivity is that of rationality, and this belongs to its very essence.

For the rest, the whole structure of the world as it exists in fact is generated from this requirement by rational necessity.

We must avoid a misunderstanding which can all too easily arise here. Hegel is not saying that everything that exists and happens comes of necessity. He is talking about the basic structure of things, the chain of levels of beings, the general shape of world history; these are manifestations of necessity. But within this structure there is not only room for contingency, but contingency, as it were, necessarily exists. For we have seen that all levels of being exist independently; but one of the distinguishing marks of the lower levels is that they only imperfectly manifest the necessity underlying things, they show it only in a rough external way; there is much in them which is purely contingent. So that many of the properties of matter, e.g. the exact number of species of parrot, cannot be deduced from the concept of the world (*WL*, II, 462).[1] Only in the higher realization of human culture is necessity fully manifest and all manifestation a reflection of necessity.

But this play of interstitial contingency does not introduce an element of the simply given, which *Geist* has not derived from himself. On the contrary, contingency and its place in the universe is itself derived by necessity from the requirements of absolute subjectivity.

contingency, and also must be of necessity, according to the structure of things! We shall see this below.

[1] Cf. also *PhG*, 193–5.

4. RATIONAL NECESSITY

What is the nature of this rational necessity? Earlier, I used the expression 'conceptual' as equivalent to 'rational' in talking of 'conceptual consciousness' or 'necessity'. This equivalence is important in Hegel but it could easily lead to misunderstanding in the context of contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy. We have developed a notion of conceptual necessity from empiricist and positivist roots, which is by no means the only conception current in English philosophy today – it may even be receding – but it is well known enough to mislead. This is the notion of conceptual necessity as opposed to contingent, causal necessity, and as reposing on the meanings of words. Certain statements were necessary and others contradictory because they combined words in such a way that they could not be true or could not but be false in virtue of their meaning. Analytic statements were thought to be true statements of this type; but for those who have doubts about analyticity, logical truths (e.g. 'horses are horses') could stand as examples.

The idea was that these necessary truths held in virtue of the meanings of words as opposed to facts about the world. The meaning of a word was the semantic and syntactical force attributed to a sign. This could of course be changed, and with certain changes some formerly necessary truths would cease to hold. 'Bachelors are unmarried' holds now, but not if we decided to use the word 'bachelor' to designate people who were not married in church, even though they were civilly married. In all this, nothing need have changed in the world.

This was of course not Hegel's idea of conceptual necessity. We can see this if we look for example at the argument described above, where the aim was to show that such-and-such structural conditions were necessary for embodied *Geist*, and see what parallels will illuminate it. Like many arguments it can of course be set up in deductive form, but this does not reveal its real structure. This is rather akin to Kant's transcendental deduction. We start with a given – in Kant's case experience, here the existence of *Geist* – and argue back to its necessary conditions. But as with Kant's transcendental arguments the necessary conditions are not derived by simple deduction from the terms used in the starting point, nor of course by examining causal relations.

Thus Kant starts from the fact of experience, moves then to the point that we could not have experience of the world unless we had a place for the distinction between what is objectively so and what is

only so for us; and then goes on to show how we could not have this distinction unless the categories hold. But the steps of this argument are neither simply deductive nor based on causal reasoning. That experience requires the distinction 'objectively/for us' is not something we derive from the concept of experience, as we derive 'unmarried' from 'bachelor'. The derivation is not analytic in Kant's sense. Of course we could decide that we would take 'experience' as incorporating this in its meaning, and turn this argument into an analytic derivation. But this would be to miss the important point about it: that we are here at a conceptual limit, such that we could not form a coherent notion of experience which did not incorporate this distinction. The whole structure of experience as by a subject and of something would collapse. This is fundamentally unlike the 'bachelor, therefore unmarried' case, in that we could tamper with our concept of bachelor, as we saw above, so that the inference would fail. But the transcendental argument claims that no one can tamper with 'experience' in the relevant way and go on saying something coherent.

Hegel's argument of the kind we described above, e.g. that *Geist* cannot be without finite spirits, is something of this type. A crucial step here is that *Geist* embodied must be placed somewhere, and hence be limited, finite. But this is not derived analytically from 'embodied'. On the contrary it appeals to another kind of conceptual limit whereby we could make no coherent sense of 'embodied but nowhere in particular'.

And yet in both these cases it is not out of order to speak of 'conceptual necessity'. For it is clear that we are not dealing here with causal impossibilities, but with a conceptual limit. To speak of 'conceptual' necessity stresses this.

Now a conceptual limit of this kind tells us about more than the meanings of terms; it also tells us about the structure of things. Though just what it says is very much open to dispute. It is possible to argue like Kant that it tells us something about the limits of our minds. But Hegel who holds that the world is posited by *Geist* according to rational necessity, necessity dictated by such conceptual limits, sees these rather as tracing the lineaments of the universe. A world constructed according to conceptual necessity is only adequately revealed in statements of conceptual necessity. In Hegel's terms, the structure of things is to be deduced from the Concept.[1]

[1] Hegel's dialectical arguments, as we shall see below, are of course more complex than the transcendental-type argument in the above example, although they

If the world is posited out of conceptual necessity, and is only adequately understood in conceptually necessary thought, then the complete self-understanding of *Geist*, which is the same as our fully adequate understanding of the world, must be a vision of conceptual necessity, a kind of seamless garment of rationality.

Now this might be thought impossible, even by those who have followed us this far. Our vision of the world cannot just be one of rational necessity. For we saw that there had to be a starting point in the goal that rational subjectivity be; and while this may involve no mitigation of the infinite freedom of *Geist*, it surely must be seen as a basic premiss, not itself established by reasoning, in our final vision of things.

But this is not how Hegel sees it. In the vision which *Geist* has of himself there is no absolute starting point; rather there is a circle. Thus we do not just assume as a starting point that *Geist* is to be, and derive the structure of the world from this. We have also to prove this proposition. And if we reflect a minute, we can see that this is necessary from more than one point of view. It is not just a matter of attaining to a seamless garment of necessity, but of being able to prove that our thesis is valid.

For it is not enough to show that if *Geist* is to be, the world must have the design which it in fact has if we want to conclude that this world is posited by *Geist* as its embodiment. The fact that things are arranged as if by design is never enough to prove a designer and hence a designing. The best we could arrive at here would be high probability, and we are concerned with necessity. What more is needed is that we are able in examining this world to show that it is in fact posited by *Geist*.

This Hegel claims to do; indeed, it is the central thread of his major works. He claims to show that when we examine the furniture of the world, we must see that it cannot be except as an emanation from *Geist*. And we show this by dialectical argument. We come to see that the things in the world cannot exist on their own because they are contradictory. Hence we can only understand them as part of a greater or deeper reality on which they lean, or of which they are parts or aspects. The dialectic goes through several stages as we climb successively beyond the unsatisfactory notions of what this self-subsistent or absolute reality could be, until we come to the only satisfactory conception of it as *Geist*, a spiritual reality which

incorporate this latter type. But they rely on the same kind of conceptual necessity.

perpetually posits the world as its necessary embodiment, and perpetually negates it as well in order to return to itself.

We shall examine dialectical argument below. For the moment it might be helpful to say this, that the argument from contradiction takes hold because of some inner complexity in the reality concerned, so that there can be a conflict between what it is and what it is meant to be. Part of the great ingenuity of Hegel's argument will be to find this kind of complexity in any and every starting point, no matter how apparently simple and impoverished. We shall see a number of examples later on, but we have already seen this kind of conflict in the Hegelian view of the subject, which is in opposition or 'contradiction' with himself because the conditions of his existence clash with his *telos*.

Thus starting from finite reality, Hegel claims to be able to demonstrate the existence of a cosmic spirit who posits the world according to rational necessity. This, if it stuck, would certainly plug the gap in his proof in that we would no longer be relying on a probabilistic 'argument from design'. But would it bring us any closer to a vision of things based throughout on rational necessity? Surely we have just displaced our underived starting point. From the existence of *Geist*, which posits the world in order to be, we have moved it back to the existence of some finite thing from which we can come to *Geist* by dialectical argument. But we still have to take this finite thing as given in order to get things started.

But on Hegel's view this starting point is not an ultimate one either. For as we saw, the existence of this finite reality can itself be demonstrated. Does this mean that in proof we are forced to an endless regress? This would certainly not meet our goal of a totally rational vision, because although there is nowhere we would have to stop, we would have to stop somewhere with an underived premiss.

But in fact we avoid the endless regress by a circle. We show in our ascending dialectic that finite reality can only be as an emanation of *Geist*, hence that given finite reality, self-positing *Geist* must be. But then we can also demonstrate, as outlined above, that a self-positing *Geist*, that is, a cosmic spirit who lays down the conditions of his own existence, must posit the structure of finite things we know. In these two movements, ascending and descending (which are in fact interwoven in Hegel's exposition), our argument returns to its starting point. The existence of finite reality which originally we just took as given is now shown to be necessary. Originally just a datum, it is now swept up in the circle of necessity.

But is this any solution? Is not a circle the paradigm of invalid

argument? This reaction is misplaced. We speak of arguing in a circle when conclusions appear in the premisses which are essential to derive them. The circle is vicious because the point of the argument is to establish a conclusion by showing that it follows from something which is easier to establish directly, or which is already known. Thus when we find that the conclusion only follows if we supplement the premiss with the conclusion itself, we see that the whole enterprise has gone astray.

Now Hegel's arguments are not circular in this way. The necessity of self-positing *Geist* follows from the existence of finite things in the dialectic without our having to assume *Geist*, or at least purports to do so. And the necessity of finite things flows from the requirements of *Geist* without our assuming arguments which establish each other's starting point, or take in each other's washing.

But in fact even this is not quite right. For the two series of arguments are not really similar and the circle does *not* precisely return to its starting point. We start the ascending dialectic from a finite reality. We close the circle by showing that this finite reality necessarily exists. 'Necessity' has a different meaning in the two phases.

In the ascending dialectic we are dealing with a necessity of inference. If finite things exist, then they are dependent on and posited by *Geist*. This is a hypothetical proposition. Symmetrical to this we might propound another hypothetical proposition to the effect that if cosmic subjectivity is to be, then the furniture of the world must be of a certain sort. But the Hegelian circle involves more than just putting these two together.

For what Hegel claims to show in the ascending movement is not just that granted finite existence there must be *Geist*. He will show that this finite existence cannot be except as posited by cosmic spirit – a cosmic spirit whose nature is to posit its own essential embodiment. Hence the ascending movement shows us that finite reality is posited by a subject according to a necessary plan. What I have called the descending movement spells out this plan, the full conditions of cosmic spirit, which are thus instantiated in the world. The outcome of the whole circle is that finite reality is shown to be not just contingently given, but to be there in fulfilment of a plan, whose articulations are determined by rational necessity.

But now the notion of necessity has changed. We are not just dealing with a necessity of inference: if A then B. In saying that what exists exists in virtue of a rationally necessary plan, we are ascribing necessary existence to it. The necessity with which Hegel's

argument concludes concerns the ground of existence of things. It is ontological necessity.

The very concept of ontological necessity may be attacked as incoherent, as Kant did attack it in the Transcendental Dialectic. A final judgement on this would have to await study of Hegel's detailed argument, particularly in the *Logic*. But there is no doubt that this concept is central to Hegel's conclusion. Hence the end of the Hegelian circle contains more than its starting point. We are not just dealing with two hypothetical arguments symmetrically joined. Rather we return and pick up a starting point initially just given and recuperate it for (ontological) necessity.

Our ascending movement thus starts with a postulate and proceeds by necessary inference. But what it infers to is ontological necessity, the proposition that everything which exists is posited by *Geist* according to a formula of rational necessity. The circle is thus not a single stream of inferences. Rather it involves a reversal of starting point. We begin with the ascending movement which is a movement of discovery. Our starting point is finite existence which is first in the order of discovery. But what we reveal is a pervasive ontological necessity, and this shows that our original starting point is really secondary. Finite reality is itself posited by *Geist*, God, the Absolute. This is the real starting point in the order of being.

Hence we get beyond the problem of a contingent or merely given starting point by rising above it to a vision of ontological necessity which englobes it. We rise to a vision of seamless necessity, and from this vantage point we see that our original starting point, along with everything which is, is part of the same web. So that nothing is left outside, nothing is merely given; and *Geist* as wholly self-positing is truly free, truly infinite, in an absolute sense that has no parallel with finite spirits.

5. A SELF-POSITING GOD

What kind of a notion is it, this Hegelian idea of a self-positing God? We saw this arise inescapably from our application of the Hegelian (and ultimately expressivist) idea of the subject to God: the subject who is necessarily embodied and whose embodiment is both the condition of his existence and the expression of what he is. With God, unlike men, the expression is coterminous with the conditions of existence and what is expressed is something totally determined out of God as subject; no part of it is just given.

This idea of God is very hard to grasp and state coherently – if

indeed it ultimately is coherent – because it cannot fit certain readily available categories in which we think of God and the world. Thus there are two clearly defined and relatively comprehensible views which could be mistaken for Hegel's.

The first, which we could call theism, looks on the world as created by a God who is separate and independent of the universe. This makes the idea readily understandable that the world is to be seen as designed, as having a structure dictated by purpose. But this cannot be accepted by Hegel, for it violates the principle of embodiment. A God who could exist without the world, without any external embodiment, is an impossibility.

Thus although Hegel takes up the notion of creation, as he takes up all Christian dogmas, he reinterprets it and speaks of the creation as necessary. To say the world was created by God is to say that it exists necessarily so that *Geist* can be. It is to say the same thing as that *Geist* posits a world, and just what this means we shall try to make a little less obscure below. But what it cannot mean is what it means for orthodox theism, that God created the world freely, having no need to do so. Or as he put it in his notes for the lectures on the philosophy of religion, 'Without the world God is not God' (*BRel*, 148).[1]

The other scheme by which we might try to understand what Hegel is saying is one we can call naturalist. Here we abandon all talk of creation, however interpreted. We think of the world as existing as a matter of fact, but having such properties that beings evolve on it who are vehicles of rational life, and moreover who come to see themselves as vehicles of a rational life which is larger than themselves and is rather that of the whole. This would avoid all danger of thinking of this rational life, or spirit of the whole, as a God separate from the world. But here too, we have a scheme unacceptable to Hegel, for the existence of such a universe would be ultimately a brute fact. True, it would happen to secrete a rational consciousness which could be called in some sense that of the whole (as for instance if the workings of the human mind reflected not just what is peculiar to man but also what he has in common with all other life, or even with all other beings – an idea which Freud, for example, seems to have flirted with at one point). But this would be contingent good fortune. The universe would not be there *in order to* embody this rational consciousness. In recognizing the structure of things, this global mind would not be recognizing his own doing, something which was there in order to conform to rational necessity,

[1] 'Ohne Welt ist Gott nicht Gott.'

and hence to his own nature as rational subject; rather he would be recognizing a given, even as we finite minds do when we contemplate our own nature. He would thus not be radically free and unconditioned. We could not speak of him as the Absolute.

Hegel can accept neither of these views. What he needs is some combination of the features of both. Like the theist, he wants to see the world as designed, as existing in order to fulfil a certain prospectus, the requirements of embodiment for *Geist*. But like the naturalists, he cannot allow a God who could design this world from the outside, who could exist before and independently of the world. His idea is therefore that of a God who eternally makes the conditions of his own existence. This is what I have been trying to express, following a frequent usage of Hegel, with the term 'posit' (*setzen*). This use of the term came in fact from Fichte, who attributed something like the same self-creation of necessary conditions to the ego.

In fact, following this parallel with Fichte, it might be best to express Hegel's idea in this way. Both of the schemes we have compared to Hegel's view repose ultimately on existential propositions: some basic reality exists, and from this everything else can be explained. In one case this is God, in the other a world with certain features. But what is fundamental in Hegel's conception is not the existence of some reality, but rather a requirement, that *Geist* be. Consequently while both the other views ultimately reach ground in contingency, that of the existence of the world or of the existence of God or of his decision to create the world, Hegel's is meant to be grounded in thoroughgoing necessity. *Geist* not only is, but he has to be, and the conditions of his existence are dictated by this necessity.

There is something in Hegel's philosophy which is irresistibly reminiscent of Baron Munchausen. The baron, it will be remembered, after falling from his horse in a swamp, extricated himself by seizing his own hair and heaving himself back on his horse. Hegel's God is a Munchausen God; but it is hard to say in this difficult domain whether his exploits should be treated with the same scepticism as those of the baron.

In any case, it is clear that Hegel is neither a theist in the ordinary sense nor an atheist. Whatever the sincerity of his claims to be an orthodox Lutheran, it is clear that Hegel only accepted a Christianity which had been systematically reinterpreted to be a vehicle of his own philosophy. It is little wonder, though, that he was much misunderstood (or perhaps too well understood) in his time, and accused frequently of heterodox views, or that some of his followers

could reinterpret him in the direction of orthodox theism. Hegel's position was in a sense on a narrow crest between theism and some form of naturalism or pantheism. The atmosphere was so rarefied on top that it was easy to fall off, and it remains so.

But how about the accusation of pantheism? This is neither a theist nor an atheist position, and seems at first sight to fit him rather well. Of course, Hegel stoutly denied the charge; cynics might attribute this to the bad effects on his employment prospects if it stuck, even as cynics have explained his protestations of Lutheranism by the impossibility of holding the chair in Berlin otherwise. But in both cases they fail to do him justice. Hegel did use the term 'pantheist' to apply to a position which indiscriminately attributed divinity to finite things. In this sense Hegel was not a pantheist. The world isn't divine for him, nor is any part of it. God is rather the subject of the rational necessity which manifests itself in the world.

What distinguished Hegel's position from pantheism in his own mind was the rational necessity which, it is true, could not exist without the world as the ensemble of finite things, but which was in this sense superior to the world; that it determined its structure according to its own exigencies. Hegel's *Geist* is thus anything but a world-soul, whose nature would be given just as ours is, however great and awe-inspiring. And it is this same insistence on rational necessity which distinguishes his view from that of certain Romantics, whose notion of an unfathomable cosmic spirit or an endless process of creation resembles that of a rationally impenetrable world-soul.

Hegel's theory has also been called by some 'panentheist' or 'emanationist', and likened in this regard to that of Plotinus. There certainly are affinities. And Hegel like the Greeks seems to be committed to something like an eternal universe, once we take seriously his reinterpretation of the dogma of creation. But here too there is no exact parallel. On an emanationist view, finite things arise from a falling away from the One. They emanate from him, perhaps inescapably, as in the famous image the sun's rays emanate from the sun. But they in turn play no essential role in his life; they are not essential to the One as he is to them. For Hegel, however, finitude is a condition of the existence of infinite life. The relationship is not something which could have been thought out before the development of the expressivist theory. It has affinities with very ancient doctrines, but it is a thoroughly modern idea.

6. CONFLICT AND CONTRADICTION

But how does this help us understand the general claims about the identity of identity and difference which Hegel makes? We started to examine Hegel's notion of the subject in order to clarify this. And we got some indication of what is meant when we saw that the human subject was prey to an inner conflict, in which the conditions of his existence were at odds with his essential goal. And we saw briefly how this might be resolved through a shift to a higher perspective in which man sees himself as vehicle of *Geist* and not simply as finite spirit.

Now the same basic conflict affects the absolute subject. It too has conditions of existence which are at odds with its *telos*. For it must be embodied in external, finite realities, finite spirits living in a world of finite, material things. And yet its life is infinite and unbounded. Its vehicle is a finite Spirit which at first has only the dimmest consciousness of himself and faces a world which is anything but immediately transparent, whose rational structure is deeply hidden. And yet its *telos* is clear rational knowledge of the rationally necessary. It is the unity of Spirit and matter, thought and extension; and yet in the world thinking beings face external reality as something other.

Like finite subjects, the absolute subject must go through a cycle, a drama, in which it suffers division in order to return to unity. It undergoes inner opposition, in order to overcome it, and rise through its vehicles to a consciousness of itself as rational necessity. And this drama is not another parallel story to the drama of opposition and reconciliation in man. It is the same one seen from a different and wider perspective. For man is the vehicle of *Geist*'s spiritual life.

The two are related in this way, that the greatest opposition in the cosmic subject is the point of departure from which the opposition grows in man. And this opposition grows in man as he strives, albeit without clear knowledge of what he is doing, to overcome this primary opposition of subject and world. The primary opposition, the point of greatest opposition for *Geist*, is its being embodied in a world at odds with itself where nothing has yet been done to cancel this opposition. This is the point which is at the beginning as far as men are concerned, where they are still sunk in nature, unconscious of their vocation, as far as possible from a true understanding of Spirit. This is the point of primitive unity for man. But in order to play their role in overcoming the opposition of the world to *Geist*,

men have to school themselves, become beings capable of reason, break away from a life sunk in nature and dominated by impulse, go beyond their immediate parochial perspectives to that of reason. And in so doing they divide within themselves, oppose Spirit to nature in their own lives. The reconciliation comes for both when men rise further beyond this standpoint of opposition, and see the greater rational necessity and their part in it. At that point they are beyond the opposition of Spirit and nature because they see how each is necessary for the other, how both spring from the same rational necessity, which determines both their opposition and then their reconciliation in the recognition of this underlying necessity.

But now we have seen that the Absolute, what is at the foundation of everything, is *Geist*, or subject, and this is not just a matter of fact, for example the world being so made that there is a single current of life in it which we can call a world-soul. Rather it is so in virtue of rational necessity. Hence the dialectic of identity and opposition in subjectivity is not of local interest. On Hegel's scheme, it must be of ontological import. If the Absolute is subject, and everything that is can only be in being related to this subject, then everything is caught up in the interplay of identity and opposition which makes up the life of this subject. But then in this case, we would not be twisting words or engaging in hyperbole if we spoke of a necessary relation of identity and opposition *tout court*.

Let us see how this and other Hegelian terms find general application in the context of this view of the world.

The Absolute, what is ultimately real, or what is at the foundation of everything, is subject. And the cosmic subject is such that he is both identical and non-identical to the world. There is identity in that *Geist* cannot exist without the world; and yet also opposition, for the world as externality represents a dispersal, an unconsciousness which *Geist* has to overcome to be itself, to fulfil its goal as self-conscious reason.

The life of the absolute subject is essentially a process, a movement, in which it posits its own conditions of existence, and then overcomes the opposition of these same conditions to realize its goal of self-knowledge. Or as Hegel puts it in the preface to the *PhG*: 'the living substance is [. . .] Subject [. . .] only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself [*Bewegung des Sichselbstsetzens*], or the mediation between a self and its development into something different [*Vermittlung des Sichanderswerdens mit sich selbst*]' (20).[1]

[1] Walter Kaufmann translation, 28.

Thus *Geist* cannot exist simply – Hegel would say 'immediately'. It can exist only by overcoming its opposite. It can exist only by negating its own negation. This is the point Hegel makes in the passage in the preface to the *PhG* immediately after the one just quoted, where he says that the Absolute is essentially *Result*, 'that it is only in the *end* what it is in truth'.[1] *Geist* is something which essentially comes to be out of a process of self-loss and return.

But *Geist* is at the root of everything, and hence mediation becomes a cosmic principle. What can claim to exist immediately is only matter, that is, pure externality. But this shows itself on examination to be incapable of separate existence; taken on its own, it is contradictory and can thus only exist as part of the whole which is the embodiment of *Geist*.

In Hegel's usage, we can speak of something as 'immediate' (*unmittelbar*) when it exists on its own, without being necessarily related to something else. Otherwise it is called 'mediate' (*vermittelt*). If on the level of ordinary talk and not of speculative philosophy I speak of someone as a man, I am speaking of him as something 'immediate', for (at this level of talk anyway) a man can exist on his own. But if I speak of him as a father, or brother, or son, then he is seen as 'mediate', for his being one of these requires his relation to someone else.

Hegel's point is that all descriptions of things as immediate turn out on closer examination to be inadequate; that all things show their necessary relation to something else, and ultimately to the whole. The whole itself can be characterized as immediate, a point Hegel sometimes makes; but he at once adds that this immediacy contains mediacy within it; and this for the obvious reason that the whole cannot even be stated without stating the dualism whose overcoming it is. To state the whole, we have to bring out two terms in opposition and yet in necessary relation (and hence mediate), and characterize the whole as the overcoming of this opposition (and hence also mediate).

Everything is thus mediate. For it cannot exist on its own. But its inability to exist on its own is supposed to spring from inner contradiction. Hence for Hegel contradiction must also be a universally applicable category.

Hegel says in a famous passage (*WL*, II, 58) that contradiction is as essential to reality as identity. Indeed, if he had to choose between these two as to which was more important, he would choose contradiction, for it is the source of all life and movement.

[1] Ibid. 32.

But this may sound itself contradictory. Hegel thinks of contradiction as the source of movement because whatever is in contradiction must pass over into something else, be this passage the ontological one between levels of being which go on existing coevally, or the historical one between different stages of human civilization. But it would seem impossible to have it both ways. If contradiction is the source of passages from one level to another, it is because it is fatal to continued existence, or so one would think from the commonsense principle that nothing contradictory can exist. Hegel seems to be using this commonsense principle when he explains dialectical passages in this way. And yet on the other hand things so go on existing (in the chain of being, if not in history) even after being convicted of contradiction, and indeed contradiction is said to be everywhere. How can we reconcile these affirmations?

The answer is that contradiction, as Hegel uses the term, is not wholly incompatible with existence, and as such perhaps does not really deserve the name. When we say that the whole is in contradiction, we mean that it unites identity and opposition, that it is opposed to itself. Perhaps one might want to amend this way of putting it to get over the apparent paradox. We might want to say, for instance, that 'identity' and 'opposition' are not to be considered incompatible. But to put it this way would miss part of the point, for in a way Hegel wants to retain some of the force of the clash between 'identity' and 'opposition'. For *Geist* is in struggle with himself, with his necessary embodiment, and only comes to realization out of this struggle. So that we would have to say that 'opposition' is both compatible and incompatible with 'identity'.

The force of using 'contradiction' here is that what is necessary for *Geist* to be at all is an obstacle to its realization as fully self-conscious rationality, as we saw earlier. Perhaps we could use the term 'ontological conflict' for this. Then we could agree with Hegel that this ontological conflict is the source of movement and change; for it is that by which nothing can exist except in struggle, except by developing itself out of its opposite.

Now at the level of the whole, this ontological conflict is not fatal because it is that which maintains the whole as *Geist*. But at the level of any part, taken by itself, it is; for this part cannot exist on its own. We could say that there is a contradiction in a stricter sense which attaches to any attempt to characterize any part of the whole – finite spirit, or thing – as self-sufficient. For the partial is essentially related to the whole. It can only be as an expression of the whole and hence of its opposite. Thus in holding only to the

self-identity of the finite we are presenting what is essentially in ontological conflict as though it escaped it; and this is a contradiction in a more understandable sense. In Hegelian terms, any attempt by the logic of the 'understanding' to see things as self-identical and hence not in opposition to themselves involves a (fatal) contradiction. Because everything is in contradiction (in the sense of ontological conflict), to try to see things as simply self-identical involves us in contradictions (in a more ordinary sense). In other words, contradiction when we fully accept it is not fatal in the way it is when we still want to stick to our old ideas about 'identity' and 'opposition'.

But the above is still not adequate to Hegel's view. For the implication is still that all that contradiction is fatal to is theories, that is, partial ways of looking at things. Whereas we find in Hegel the idea many times stated that real existences go under because of contradiction. This is true of historical forms, but it is also true of finite spirits, animals, things. But, one might protest, these latter continue to exist, while historical forms disappear. Yes, Hegel replies, they go on existing as types, but the individual specimens go under, they are all mortal; and this mortality is necessary; it is a reflection of the ontological conflict.

We saw above that any attempt to claim independent existence, free from relation to the whole, and hence to its other, on behalf of a finite thing involved contradiction in the strict and thus fatal sense. But Hegel is suggesting that we see the very external existence of a finite thing, material object, animal or finite spirit, as a kind of claim to independent existence. It is the property of matter that it exists *partes extra partes*, and that things that exist materially have a kind of independent existence. Thus it is not just that material existence suggests independence to us; it is itself a form of independent existence, a standing claim to be on its own. It is essential that this claim be made, as we have seen; for *Geist* requires external material existence in order to be. But it is just as essential that this claim be abrogated, for *Geist* can only be in a world in which the parts are essentially related in this way. And this is what determines the fate of finite things. They must come into existence, but at the same time they are the victims of an internal contradiction which ensures that they will also pass away. They are necessarily mortal. But at the same time, in going under they have to be replaced by other similar things.

We can now see more clearly the underlying principle of those ascending dialectics in which Hegel will show that finite things cannot exist on their own, but only as part of a larger whole. The

motor of these dialectics is contradiction; and the contradiction consists in this, that finite beings just in virtue of existing externally in space and time make a claim to independence, while the very basis of their existence is that they express a spirit which cannot brook this independence. The ascending dialectic reveals the contradiction in things and shows from the nature of the contradiction how it can only be understood and reconciled if things are seen as part of the self-movement of the Absolute.

Thus contradiction, in the strong sense which involves combining ontological conflict with its denial, is mortal. But since this 'denial' is not just an intellectual error by us who observe, but is essential to the whole which is in ontological conflict itself, we can see that contradiction in the strong sense is what makes things move and change. It is their inherent changeability (*Veränderlichkeit*); while contradiction in the sense of ontological conflict is the source of the changeability.

Contradiction is thus fatal to partial realities, but not to the whole. But this is not because the whole escapes contradiction. Rather the whole as Hegel understands it lives on contradiction. It is really because it incorporates contradiction and reconciles it with identity that it survives. This the partial reality – material object or finite spirit – cannot encompass. It is stuck with its own independent existence, and since this independence clashes with the basis of its existence, it is caught in contradiction and must die. It must die because it is identified with only one term, the affirmation, and cannot encompass the denial.

Not so the whole. The Absolute goes on living through both the affirmation and the denial of finite things. It lives by this process of affirmation and denial; it lives via the contradiction in finite things. Thus the Absolute is essentially life and movement and change. But at the same time, it remains itself, the same subject, the same essential thought being expressed, throughout this movement. It reconciles identity and contradiction by maintaining itself in a life process which is fed on ontological conflict. This combination of incessant change and immobility is described by Hegel in a striking image from the preface to the *PhG*: 'The true is thus the bacchanalian whirl in which no member is not drunken: and because each, as soon as it detaches itself, dissolves immediately – the whirl is just as much transparent and simple repose' (39).

7. THE OPPOSITIONS OVERCOME

We can see now how this system of thought offered the hope of overcoming the oppositions mentioned in the first section, without paying the price which the Romantics were willing to pay in abandoning free rationality. Hegel's notion of the Absolute does give a sense to his thesis of the 'identity of identity and difference'. And this is meant to allow him to have it both ways, as it were; to keep both terms of the opposition in their full force, and yet to see them as one; to see them as coming to unity out of opposition.

The major oppositions which we adumbrated in the first section were those between man and nature, from which man becomes divided both as a knowing subject and an agent; between individual and community; and between finite and infinite spirit. This last opposition is also reflected in man's relation to fate.

The epistemological gap between man and nature expresses itself in its best-known form in the Kantian distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves. The latter were for ever and in principle unknowable. Hegel directs a powerful polemic against the Kantian thing-in-itself. And the final argument is this: how can there be anything beyond knowledge, that is, beyond mind or *Geist*, for *Geist* turns out ultimately to be identical with the whole or reality?

More specifically, the opposition is overcome in the fact that our knowledge of the world turns ultimately into *Geist*'s self-knowledge. For we come to discover that the world which is supposedly beyond thought is really posited by thought, that it is a manifestation of rational necessity. And at the same time the thought which was supposedly over against the world, that is, our thinking as finite subjects, turns out to be that of the cosmos itself, or the cosmic subject, God, whose vehicles we are. In the higher vision of speculative philosophy, the world loses its otherness to thought, and subjectivity goes beyond finitude, and hence the two meet. We overcome the dualism between subject and world, between knowing man and nature, in seeing the world as the necessary expression of thought, or rational necessity, while we see ourselves as the necessary vehicles of this thought, as the point where it becomes conscious. (And become conscious it must, for the rationally necessary order of things includes the necessity that this rationally necessary order appear to itself.)

This means that we come to see ourselves not just as finite subjects, with our own thoughts as it were, but as the vehicles of a thought

which is more than just ours, that is in a sense, the thought of the universe as a whole, or in Hegel's terms, of God.

Hegel's answer to the Kantian doctrine of the *Ding-an-sich* is thus to throw down the barrier between man and the world in having the knowledge of finite subjects culminate in the self-knowledge of infinite subject. But he does not break through the barrier by a Romantic abandonment in which subject and object are felt ultimately to coincide in a kind of ineffable intuition of unity.

Rather Hegel solves the problem of uniting finite to infinite spirit without loss of freedom through his notion of reason. As we saw at the end of section 1, none of Hegel's Romantic contemporaries resolved this dilemma. Either they held to the vision of an unboundedly free creative subject, but at the cost of exile in a God-forsaken world; or they sought unity with the divine beyond reason, but at the cost of abandoning their autonomy to a larger order beyond their comprehension. For Hegel too the finite subject must be part of a larger order. But since this is an order deployed by an unconditional rational necessity, it is at no point foreign to ourselves as rational subjects. Nothing in it must just be accepted as brute, 'positive' fact. The rational agent loses none of his freedom in coming to accept his vocation as vehicle of cosmic necessity.

Nor does this union with cosmic spirit only accommodate us as subjects of rational thought at the expense of our lower, empirical, desiring nature, for this too is part of the necessary order of things. The infinite subject is such that in order to be he must have an external embodiment; and external embodiment means embodiment in space and time, an embodiment which is somewhere and sometime, in a particular living being, with all that this involves. The infinite subject can only be through a finite one.

Hence nothing of us is abandoned when we come to assume our full role as vehicles of *Geist*. Because the order of which we are a part is deployed by a spirit whose nature is unadulterated rational necessity, and because this spirit necessarily posits us as finite subjects, we can identify with it without remainder. By this vision of absolute reason, ungrounded in the merely given, Hegel believes himself to have resolved the dilemma of the Romantic generation.

Two related essential features of the Hegelian solution follow from this. The first is that the unity of man and world, of finite and infinite subject, does not abolish the difference. Not only is the unity hard-won out of difference, as man struggles to rise to the level where the unity can be grasped; but the ultimate unity retains the difference within it. We remain finite subjects over against the

world and God, men with all the particularities of our time, place and circumstances, even as we come to see this particular existence as part of a larger plan, as we come to be vehicles of a larger self-consciousness, that of *Geist*. Spirit's return to unity necessarily incorporates duality.

Secondly, the Absolute must be understood in concepts (*Begriffe*), as Hegel insists in the preface to the *PhG* (13), and not in feeling and intuition (*Gefühl und Anschauung*). Man cannot abandon understanding, the 'frightful power' (*ungeheure Macht – PhG*, 29) by which men analyse their world, divide themselves from nature and fix the distinction between things. This is in a sense like the power of death which removes things from the stream of life. But we cannot overcome it by fleeing from it, but only by pushing this power of clear thought to the limit, where the division is overcome in the dialectical thought of reason. The great power of understanding is 'to hold on to what is dead' (*das Tote festzuhalten*). The life of the Spirit is one which 'endures, and preserves itself through, death'. It finds itself only in 'absolute self-division' (*absolute Zerrissenheit* – 29–30).[1] A certain 'powerless beauty' (*kraftlose Schönheit*) cannot do this, and it thus cannot come to a real vision of unity, for it can never incorporate the 'seriousness, the pain, the patience and the labour of the negative' (20).

Hegel will not abandon the clear distinctions of thought. But he claims to eat his cake and have it through his new concept of reason. This is founded on the ontological thesis that these oppositions themselves proceed from and return to identity, so that the thought which marks the clearest distinction is also that which unites. The opposition itself, pushed to the limit, goes over into identity. Man separates from nature in the course of realizing his vocation as a rational being. But it is just this vocation fully realized, just the full development of rationality which shows him to himself as the vehicle of *Geist* and thus reconciles the opposition.

This idea of a duality which is overcome without being abolished finds expression in two key Hegelian terms. The first is *Aufhebung*. This is Hegel's term for the dialectical transition in which a lower stage is both annulled and preserved in a higher one. The German word *aufheben* can in fact carry either of these meanings. Hegel combined them to make his term of art.

Secondly, because the unity does not just abolish the distinction, Hegel often speaks of the resolution as a 'reconciliation' (*Versöhnung*);

[1] Kaufmann translation, 50.

this word implies that the two terms remain, but that their opposition is overcome.

This term 'reconciliation' comes often to the fore in connection with the opposition between man and God, between finite and infinite spirit, as can well be imagined. As far as the theoretical opposition is concerned, its resolution is already implicit in the foregoing discussion of the duality man/world. For this latter was overcome by our showing the ultimate identity of God's self-knowledge with man's knowledge of the universe. That is, ultimately art, religion and philosophy, what Hegel called 'absolute spirit', give us the self-knowledge of *Geist*. The idea of God as necessarily hidden and unknowable is therefore overcome, although like the idea of the *Ding-an-sich* it belongs to a necessary stage of human development.

How about the practical oppositions, between man as agent and nature, between man and the state, man and his fate?

Man had to turn against nature within and without, to curb instinct within himself, and to treat the things around him as instruments to be bent to his will. He had to break with an earlier unity and communion with nature.[1] He had to 'desacralize' (*entgöttern*) the world. This was an essential step towards freedom.

But here too the opposition, pushed to its limit, leads to reconciliation. The moral agent who strives to act on the dictates of pure practical reason independent of inclination is finally forced by reason itself to a conception of himself as vehicle of *Geist* and hence to a reconciliation with the nature of things, speculatively understood, which is also an expression of *Geist*. This reconciliation does not mean a return to original unity but preserves rational freedom.

At the same time man in acting on external nature to serve his purposes, in working helps to transform it and himself and to bring both sides towards the eventual reconciliation. This idea of the crucial importance of work, which is central to Marx's theory, originates with Hegel. He deals with it specifically for instance in the discussion of master and slave in the second part of the *PhG*. But there is an important difference between the two views. It is clear that for both writers man forms himself, comes to realize his own essence in the attempt to dominate and transform nature. But the

[1] There was in fact more than one such break in the Hegelian view of history. For the period of 'original unity' *par excellence*, the one that was the object of the greatest nostalgia in the late eighteenth century – classical Greece – was itself the product in Hegel's view of man's shaping of himself and nature, which culminated in the creation of an art centred on human form. It was preceded by more primitive stages, and was already an achievement.

major difference is that for Marx the actual changes wrought in nature and the consequent man-made environment are of major significance, while for Hegel the role of work and its products is mainly to create and sustain a universal consciousness in man. This of course reflects the fact that for Marx the industrial revolution was the major fact of human history while Hegel's thought is still concerned with what was largely a pre-industrial world. But it also reflects, of course, the (related) major difference between what each writer considered to be the human essence.

As for the opposition between man and the state, we can already see how this will be overcome in Hegel's system. The state plays an important role as an embodiment of the universe in human life. In the formation of the individual as a vehicle of universal reason, the state has an indispensable part. In belonging to it the individual is already living beyond himself in some larger life; and as the state comes to its 'truth' as an expression of universal reason in the form of law, it brings the individual with it towards his ultimate vocation.

Thus in its more primitive forms, the state can be and is in opposition to man who aspires to be a free self-conscious individual. But this opposition is destined to be overcome. For the free individual must ultimately come to see himself as the vehicle of universal reason; and when the state comes to its full development as the embodiment of this reason, then the two are reconciled. Indeed, the free individual cannot realize himself as free outside the state. For from Hegel's principle that there can be no disembodied spiritual life it follows that he cannot accept a definition of freedom like that of the Stoics, which sees it as an inner condition of man unaffected by his external fate. A purely inner freedom is only a wish, a shadow. It is an important stage of human development when man comes to have this wish, this idea, but it must not be confused with the real thing. Freedom is only real (*wirklich*) when expressed in a form of life; and since man cannot live on his own, this must be a collective form of life; but the state is the collective mode of life which is backed by the full power of the community; and thus freedom must be embodied in the state.

The last practical opposition is that between finite and infinite life and is brought home most forcefully by a consideration of fate. We can endow human life with as much significance as we wish in considering man, the rational animal, as the vehicle of universal reason. This goes for what man does at the full stretch of his powers. But what about the absurdity of what just happens, including the greatest absurdity of all, death? How do we incorporate this in a

meaningful whole? Or to put it in another way, how do we justify the ways of God (laying on him the responsibility of fate) to man?

Hegel is ready to take this on too. He speaks of his philosophy of history as a 'theodicy', and we can see why. Man's fate can be given a place in the skein of necessity just as well as his achievements.[1] Death itself, the death of particular men, is necessary in the scheme of things, as is the death of any animal, and the ultimate disappearance of any external reality; for as external all these things are in contradiction to themselves and must go under.

But more than for the death of men, Hegel in his philosophy of history accounts for the death of civilizations. What seems senseless and ultimately unjustified, the destruction and decay of some of the finest earlier civilizations,[2] is shown to be a necessary stage on the road to realization of *Geist* in the law-state and reason. That is, not only death itself, but the particular incidence of fate in history is shown to be part of the meaningful plan, with which man as reason can be fully reconciled.

One may stop well short of conviction before Hegel's theodicy. It is indeed difficult to see how man can be reconciled to fate, how he can fail to see it as a 'negation'. Even if we accept the general plan of history, and are reconciled to the death of civilization, how do we understand as meaningful the premature death of quite non-world-historical individuals, of children, for instance? One doesn't have to go to the lengths of Ivan Karamazov and give a weight greater than world history to the tears of an innocent child in order to feel that Hegel has not met the difficulty.

But in Hegel's view such instances of individual fate are beneath the sweep of necessity; they fall in the domain of that interstitial contingency whose existence is necessary, as we have seen. We can be reconciled with this as well as with world history if we identify with what we essentially are, universal reason. If we really come to see ourselves as vehicles of universal reason, then death is no longer an 'other'; for it is part of the plan. We are in that sense already beyond death; it is no longer a limit. It is incorporated in the life of reason which goes on beyond it.

[1] Hegel's mature 'theodicy' thus develops out of the conception of fate he expounded in the MS, of the 1790s called 'The Spirit of Christianity'. But it now encompasses much more. The destiny with which men reconcile themselves now incorporates division as well as unity.

[2] Hegel speaks in his lectures on the philosophy of history of the melancholy and sorrow we cannot help feeling when we look on the ruins of ancient civilizations and reflect 'daß die reichste Gestaltung, das schönste Leben in der Geschichte den Untergang finden, daß wir da unter Trummern des Vortreflichen wandeln' (*VG*, 34–5).

I have given only the briefest outline here of the way in which Hegel believes himself to have resolved the dualisms which aroused the deepest concern in his time and which provided the most powerful motivation of his own philosophical effort: how in short he thought to answer the aspiration of the age in uniting the greatest rational autonomy with the fullest expressive unity with nature. The discussion of these solutions in detail provides some of the richest passages of Hegel's work.

Up to now, I have just been trying to *present* the general lines of Hegel's system. But it follows from its very nature as here presented, as a system which claims to reconcile the major oppositions by reason itself, that it cannot just be *presented* but has to be *demonstrated.* Rather, we might say that its only adequate presentation is a demonstration.

What can we consider a demonstration? A demonstration must be able to take us from our ordinary understanding of things, and show that this is untenable, that it must give way to Hegel's vision of things. It will start therefore at the bottom, with the disconnected external jumble which we see as the world, and force us to move to the vision of a system of necessity whose apex is *Geist.*

One obvious path for a demonstration will therefore start from the hierarchy of being which we all observe and show it to be connected systematically in the way adumbrated above. We will show this hierarchy of beings to be the embodiment and manifestation of a formula of rational necessity in which each level has its necessary place. We will start with the lowest and most external level, matter extended in time and space; we will lay bare its underlying concepts and its necessary links to higher levels. In this way we will pass through the various stages of inanimate being, through the various levels of life to Spirit, which in turn will show a development in human history.

This is the demonstration which occupies the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit: which is thus laid out in the latter two sections of the *Encyclopaedia*, and in the various works which expanded parts of this, such as the *Philosophy of Right*, Philosophies of History and Religion, History of Philosophy, Aesthetics etc.

But we can think of another demonstration which is in a sense prior to this one. The entire chain of being which we run through in the above demonstration is a manifestation of a chain of rational necessity, the formula of which is expressed in the Idea, as Hegel

terms it. Why not then get at this more directly by a study not of the various kinds of reality as in the above demonstration, but simply of the categories in which we think of the world? In examining each of these we shall find that on its own it is contradictory, that it refers us beyond itself, and that ultimately the only category that can maintain itself will be the Idea. We can then conceive of a demonstration which starts with the poorest, most empty category, with 'being', and which shows its internal contradiction, and hence passes on to other categories which are in turn shown to be contradictory, moving always to higher and higher levels of complexity, until we come to the Idea. This is the demonstration which we find in the Logic, and hence in the first part of the *Encyclopaedia*.

Is there room for another demonstration? In a sense not, that is, not on the same level. For the two previous ones form a perfect circle. The Logic develops our understanding of the categories until we come to the Idea, which shows us that these categories are necessarily embodied in external reality; we therefore turn to examine this external reality, at first in its most 'external' form, and we climb the scale of the Philosophy of Nature and then that of Spirit. At the culmination of this we reach the vision of absolute spirit, of the life of God as the perfect self-knowledge of the whole. But what does God know in knowing himself? Obviously the chain of rational necessity which is laid out in the Logic and which culminates in the Idea. So we have come full circle.

But whatever the value of this reasoning, the fact is that Hegel did give us a third demonstration, that which we find in the *Phenomenology*. We can think of it as a kind of prolegomenon, an introduction to the main system. Hegel wrote the work in 1806–7, a number of years before he published the definitive form of his system; and one may wonder therefore what role he retrospectively gave it; and this particularly in that the title 'Phenomenology' reappears to designate a section of the Philosophy of Spirit, and this section does go over some of the ground covered in the earlier work.

But the answer to this can only be speculative (in the ordinary slightly pejorative and not in the Hegelian sense). We do have in fact in the *PhG* the most powerful and exciting of Hegel's works. Its principle is to start not from the forms of being, or from the categories, but from the forms of consciousness. It is in that sense the demonstration which fulfils best one of Hegel's principal goals, which is to take us from where we are and bring us to a vision of the system.

The idea is thus to start with the poorest, most elementary

notion of what consciousness is, to show that this cannot stand up, that it is riven with inner contradiction and must give way to another higher one; this one in turn is shown to be contradictory, and we are thus referred farther until we come to the true understanding of consciousness as self-knowing *Geist*, or absolute knowledge.

There isn't space here to go into these three major demonstrations of Hegel's philosophy. But something should be said about their nature as demonstrations, and that means about Hegel's conception of the dialectic.

The dialectic for Hegel is not a 'method' or 'approach'. If we want to characterize Hegel's method in his great demonstrations we might just as well speak of it as 'descriptive', following Kenley Dove.[1] For his aim is simply to follow the movement in his object of study. The task of the philosopher is 'to submerge his freedom in [the content], and let it be moved by its own nature' (*PhG*, 48). If the argument follows a dialectical movement, then this must be in the things themselves, not just in the way we reason about them.

Now we have already seen that there is a dialectical movement in things because they are riven with contradiction. Every partial reality is posited by the whole or Absolute as a necessary condition of the Absolute's existence; for this Absolute can only be as embodied in a world of external, physical things and finite spirits. And yet these partial realities, just because they exist externally, each alongside the other, make a standing claim to independence which belies their status as posited vehicles of the whole.

We speak of 'contradiction' in this context because we can give a sense to the language of claim and denial when talking about things. But we can give a sense to this language because we see things not as just there, but as posited in order to embody and express *Geist*. In other words it is the ultimate ontological status of the category of purpose, and expressive purpose, which gives a sense to the theory of ontological contradiction. The whole furniture of the world is there in order to embody *Geist* and to manifest what he essentially is, self-knowing spirit, self-thinking thought, pure rational necessity.

But the inescapable medium of expression of this thought is external reality, and this cannot carry the message integrally. It is bound to distort it, just because this reality is external, its parts independent of each other and subject to contingency. That is why external reality does not express the thought of rational necessity through some stable concatenation of enduring things, but rather

[1] 'Hegel's phenomenological method', *Review of Metaphysics*, 33, 4 (June 1970).

through the process in which things come to be and pass away. Pass away they must, because they contradict the very basis of their existence, which is to express rational necessity; but in thus cancelling what it has posited Spirit comes after all to say what it wanted. What could not be expressed in external existence is expressed in the movement by which these existents come to be and pass away. The 'distortion' which external reality imposed on Spirit's message is corrected by its necessary demise. Spirit never comes to one unchanging expression which says it all, but in the play of affirmation and denial it manifests what it is.

Hence, it is ultimately because we see reality on Hegel's theory as posited in order to say or manifest something, that we can speak of certain of its pervasive and inescapable features – such as existence *partes extra partes* – as 'distortions', as saying something different from what they are meant to say, and hence as 'contradicting'.

But this insight will not help us in an ascending dialectic for it already incorporates what we have to prove. Instead of showing how all partial realities must be contradictory once we accept the world as embodiment and expression of *Geist*, we have to start by pointing out the contradiction in finite existents and move from there to show how this contradiction can only be made sense of if we see these finite things as part of the embodiment of *Geist*. It is not enongh to show that *Geist* requires finite existents; we also have to show that these require *Geist*. Examined closely, they have to show their dependence on the whole. Otherwise Hegel's conception, which is also *Geist*'s knowledge of himself, is just another vision based on faith, or on overall plausibility; and this is unacceptable if *Geist* is reason.

But how can we discover contradiction in finite things? Taken just by themselves, as ordinary consciousness sees them, material objects or finite spirits are just given. We just saw that to see them as in contradiction we have to look on them as posited. But this is just what we are not allowed to do at the beginning without begging the question and violating our method. We seem caught in a vicious circle. How do we get started?

Hegel's claim will be that whatever reality we consider, no matter how circumscribed and seemingly independent, will manifest the inner articulation necessary for contradiction. This inner articulation is one where we can distinguish what the thing concerned is aiming at or is meant to be, on one hand, and what it effectively is on the other. Once this is so, then there can be a clash between effective existence and the goal or standard aimed at, and hence

the thing is liable to contradiction. Thus the goal we discern does not have to be that of expressing *Geist* in the first instance. We can start off with a lesser standard, and by showing how effective existence cannot meet this standard, manifest a contradiction.

This is how Hegel accounts for dialectical contradiction in the *PhG*. We start off with something which is intrinsically characterized by the purpose it is bent on realizing or the standard it must meet. We then show of this thing that it cannot effectively fulfil this purpose or meet the standard (and the 'cannot' here is one of conceptual necessity). We are up against a contradiction.

This can take two forms. It can be that the purpose is in fact unrealized in the thing as it is; and in this case the existing reality will necessarily go under or be transformed as the purpose in further pursuing itself cancels its inadequate fulfilment. Or it can be that the standard is already met. And then the contradiction will force us to change our conception of the standard or purpose, or our conception of the reality in which it is fulfilled, in order to give a coherent account of this fulfilment.

And we in fact find dialectics of these two sorts in Hegel. His historical dialectics are of the first form: certain historical forms of life are prey to inner contradiction, either because they are doomed to frustrate the very purpose for which they exist (e.g., the master–slave relation), or because they are bound to generate an inner conflict between different conditions which are equally essential to the fulfilment of the purpose (as with the Greek *polis*, whose fate Hegel discusses in chapter VI of the *PhG*). These forms are thus destined to go under and be replaced by others.

But Hegel also presents dialectics of the other kind, which we can call 'ontological'. We have an example in the opening section of the *PhG* and also in the *Logic*. Here we are not dealing with historical change, or at least not primarily. Rather we are deepening our conception of a given standard and of the reality which meets it. And essential to the dialectical argument is the notion that the standard is already met. It is because we know this that we know that any conception of the purpose or standard which shows it as unrealizable must be a faulty conception; and it is this which takes us from stage to stage of the dialectic.

This distinction only concerns the basis from which a dialectical argument starts. It has nothing to do with the kind of contradiction it deals with. Thus it would be very wrong to see the distinction as one between dialectics which deal with contradictions in reality, and dialectics which deal with contradictions in our conceptions of

reality. For in Hegel's most important ontological dialectic, the *Logic*, the contradictory conceptions whose dialectical movement we follow really apply. They correspond to contradictory realities, which as such show their dependence on a larger whole which the higher categories describe. In other words the contradictions in our conceptions of reality will not be overcome by resolving them into a vision free of contradiction, but rather by seeing that they reflect contradictions in reality which are reconciled in a larger synthesis.

Similarly, the dialectic of consciousness in the *PhG* takes us through a critique of inadequate conceptions of knowledge considered as a realized standard. But at the same time, all the definitions we examine, even the most inadequate, have been held by men to be true at one time or other (including the present in the case of some men). They have thus necessarily shaped practice. And this means that the perfection of knowledge, where knowledge of the world comes together with self-knowledge, has not always been realized. The practice of knowledge, unlike that of playing hockey, say, cannot be divorced from our conception of it. Knowledge is *ipso facto* imperfect if it is in error about its own nature. Hence perfect knowledge can only be attained when men reach an adequate conception of it.[1]

Thus the dialectic of theories of knowledge is connected to a dialectic of historical forms of consciousness.

Reciprocally, while historical dialectics deal with the contradiction between certain historical forms and the basic purposes sought in them, this is also bound up with a contradiction in men's ideas. Indeed, the way men conceive the basic purposes of mankind is essential to the characterization of any given historical form and its inadequacy. That men at the beginning of history are incapable of realizing man's potential is bound up with their inability to conceive the goals of man (and *Geist*) adequately.

And it is because the conception of men's basic purposes that goes with a given historical life form is inadequate, that men at this stage are bound to defeat these purposes. This inadequate conception is thus essential to the contradiction; for the contradiction comes not from the fact that men's purposes go awry, but that men defeat them

[1] This does not mean that there are a number of historical forms of knowledge which are correctly characterized as sensible certainty, perception etc. For the basic properties of these early, inadequate conceptions is that they are in error about themselves. It is this clash between their self-idea and their effective reality which is the motor of the dialectic. But to the extent that they are in error, they are distortions of knowledge, which can be accounted for adequately neither by their own self-image nor by the conception of perfect knowledge.

in trying to fulfil them. So that the contradiction in any historical society or civilization can be said to consist in this, that men's basic purposes, conceived in the terms of this society, are doomed to be self-defeating. Thus the play of changing conceptions is as essential to historical dialectics as the change of historical reality, and indeed the one is bound up with the other.

We can see from this how closely related the two kinds of dialectic are in Hegel's work. Each figures in the explanation of the other. Hegel's philosophy of history refers us to his ontology; and his ontology requires historical development.

I spoke above of dialectical movement as generated by a clash between a purpose or standard and its attempted fulfilment. But we can see from the above that we might better understand it as a relation involving not just two terms but three: the basic purpose or standard, the inadequate reality, and an inadequate conception of the purpose which is bound up with that reality. This is clear in the case of the historical dialectics. There is a purpose which is frustrated by the inadequate conception of it which arises inescapably out of a certain historical form of life.

But the ontological dialectics also involve three terms. We start off with an inadequate notion of the standard involved. But we also have from the beginning some very basic, correct notions of what the standard or purpose is, some criterial properties which it must meet. It is these criterial properties which in fact enable us to show that a given conception of the standard is inadequate. For we show that this conception cannot be realized in such a way as to meet the criterial properties, and hence that this definition is unacceptable as a definition of the standard or purpose concerned. But we show the inadequacy of the faulty formula by trying to 'realize' it, that is, construct a reality according to it. This is what brings out the conflict with the standard. So that reality is our third term.

We can illustrate this point, and at the same time show why Hegel calls this kind of argument 'dialectical', by glancing back at Plato. For Plato's argument can sometimes be understood on this model, that is, as the discovery of contradiction in formulae which are put forward as definitions of a certain idea or standard and are then successively set aside for more adequate ones.

Thus in *Republic* I, when Cephalos puts forward a definition of justice as telling the truth and giving back what one owes, Socrates refutes it with an example, that of a man whose arms one is keeping and who asks for them back in a state of madness. This example is

enough to set aside Cephalos' definition. This is because the formula 'tell the truth and pay your debts' is put forward as a definition of justice. Now we do not yet know the true definition of justice at this stage of the dialogue. But we do know some of its criterial properties. We know for instance that a just act is a good act, one which should be done. When we have shown therefore an act which conforms to the above formula, but which should not be done, as manifestly one should not return his arms to a madman, one makes it untenable as a definition of justice; for to go on maintaining it would involve one in the contradiction of saying that the act was both just and wrong. What Socrates has done is to show what it would be like to fulfil the standard as defined in Cephalos' formula, that is, what it would be like to act on it across the board. And he shows from this example that Cephalos' principle can't be fulfilled compatibly with the criterial properties of justice. Hence it cannot be a definition of justice.

This dialectic thus involves three terms: it starts with (1) a definition of justice and (2) certain criterial properties of justice, and shows these to conflict when we try (3) to realize the definition in a general practice. We can see a parallel with Hegel's dialectical arguments, both historical and ontological, which always operate with three terms; the true purpose or standard, an inadequate conception of it, and the reality where they meet and separate.

We can thus see how a Hegelian dialectic can get started without our having to accept at the outset Hegel's entire vision. We only need to find a starting point whereby some finite reality is to be seen as the (attempted) realization of a goal or fulfilment of a standard. It is not necessary that this goal or standard which we identify at the beginning be that of Spirit returning to itself. It is enough that the historical purpose go beyond men's subjective understanding of their own goals, so that the latter can be shown as a self-defeating misconception of the former, or that we have a standard which shares some criterial properties with realized *Geist*.

Then (provided our arguments hold) a dialectic can get going in which our first conception (or the first historical form), being shown to be inadequate, is replaced by another. Hegel insists on the point that once a dialectical argument gets going there is no arbitrary play in it, but each stage is determined by the previous one. Since the contradiction which affects our first stage or conception has a determinate shape, it is clear what changes have to be undertaken to overcome it. And this sets the nature of the next stage. But this second stage itself may be shown to be prey to contradiction, for its

realization may be uncombinable with the criterial properties in another way, or fall into contradiction in attempting to embody them, or frustrate the historical purpose in its own fashion. And then the dialectic moves on to a fresh stage. Thus following a dialectical movement is not like deploying a sceptical argument, Hegel claims, where the proof that a form is in contradiction leaves us in the void. Each contradiction has a determinate outcome; it leaves us with a positive result (*PhG*, 68).

Hence given a starting point in a reality which is a realized standard or purpose, and granted that all the arguments work, we could climb from stage to stage up to a conception of the whole as *Geist* which alone successfully incorporates contradiction.

But this account may not make us very much more sanguine about the prospects of Hegel's ascending dialectics. For it is not enough that we be *able* to look on something as the realization of an intrinsic goal, that this be one way we *could* look at things. Such a problematic starting point could yield by dialectical argument a view of things which might convince us by its plausibility, but would not be a binding argument; it would not command our assent in all rigour. To do the work Hegel wants, this starting point has to be undeniable. And this seems a tall order.

But it is one Hegel undertakes to fulfil. Both the *PhG* and the *Logic* can in fact make some claim to an unquestionable point of departure. In the *PhG* we begin with consciousness. And our starting point is going to be the knowing subject. But this, unlike a stone or a river, is already something which must be defined in terms of purpose realized, in terms of achievement – even in the eyes of 'natural' consciousness. 'Knowing', as we could put it, is an achievement verb. But then our gross, ordinary conceptions of this consciousness can be the starting points of a dialectic. For supposing we could show that knowledge, as they interpret it, is in fact unrealizable (by necessity), that what fulfilled their formulae could not be called knowledge by their own criteria. We should in this case have uncovered a deep contradiction or incoherence in the ordinary view which would require its amendment.

Similarly, in the *Logic* Hegel examines categorial concepts, beginning with 'being' and continuing through 'quality', 'quantity', 'essence', 'cause' etc. And here too, Hegel holds, to see these as categorial concepts, i.e. concepts applying to some general feature of reality as such, is to make a claim on their behalf: that we are able to characterize the real or the existent with them.

Now, Hegel claims, when we actually attempt to do so, we find

that they are inadequate, that reality as characterized by these concepts involves something essentially incomplete or even incoherent.

Thus, to take the most famous example, Hegel opens the *Logic* with the concept of being. But if we take this concept alone, without any determination, it turns out to be empty, to be equivalent to 'nothing'. That is, nothing could be which was *just* characterized as 'being'. Anything which is also has to be determinate in some sense, to have some quality.

So, Hegel claims, 'being' turns out to reveal a contradiction – that it is equivalent to 'nothing' – when we take it as a categorial concept, that is, when we take it as sufficient to characterize some general feature of reality. For then it runs up against one of the criterial properties of the real – in this case, that what exists must be determinate.

In other cases, Hegel claims, the application of a concept across the board yields an incoherent picture of reality. The kind of thing Hegel had in mind here was already illustrated in the famous Kantian antinomies, where contradictions arise when we attempt to apply certain concepts to the full extent of their possible application. The logic of these concepts seems to license two contradictory assertions. Thus in applying the notions of division of space and time in a systematic way, or in applying that of limit to the whole, or in using the related notions of causation and freedom to their full legitimate extent, we seem driven by our understanding of these concepts to make two utterly unreconcilable assertions, which both seem equally well founded.

Hegel explicitly acknowledges his debt to Kant in this regard, although he holds that Kant was wrong to limit the antinomies to four. 'Becoming, Determinate Being, etc. and every other concept could each provide its particular antinomy, and as many antinomies could be set up as concepts were brought forward' (*WL*, I, 184).

Thus these dialectics at least have a defensible starting point: the fact of knowledge, and the applicability of some categorial concepts. But this is not the case with Hegel's historical dialectics. These start typically with the imputation of a certain purpose to men (or *Geist*) in a certain historical form. This purpose is frustrated by the effective reality of the historical form, and the result is conflict, breakdown and ultimately the replacement of the reality by a more adequate one. Hegel attempts to explain in this way the great transitions of human history, the demise of the Greek *polis*, the rise of modern European states, the end of the *ancien régime* etc.

But this account of transition is only valid if the imputation of purpose is; and what justifies us in accepting this in the first place?

If we look at Hegel's most successful historical dialectics, the ones which are the most illuminating and convincing, we find that in fact they convince the way any good historical account does, because they 'fit' well as an interpretation.[1]

That is, what we know about a given period can be made sense of, can be made to cohere without implausibility on this account, or in any case with less implausibility than other rival explanations. But the point about these interpretive explanations is that they have no absolutely certain starting point. The original imputation of a certain purpose to the actors, or a certain bent to events, or a certain logic of the situation is quite ungrounded on its own. It is only when it has been followed out, and connected with all the other imputations which go with it, and when these have been seen to fit the facts with plausibility, and to make overall sense, that we feel confident about accepting it.

Thus Hegel's account of the breakdown of the Greek city state turns on the underlying purpose of realizing a consciousness and way of life which is universal. The *polis* both fulfils this purpose and at the same time frustrates it because of its parochial nature. But what will convince us to accept this imputation of purpose to man (or *Geist*) as the mainspring of events? Only the sense which it enables us to make of the events of the period, the way it relates the vogue of the sophists, the development of Greek literature and culture, changes in Greek religion, the decay of the city state and so on, into a whole which is both plausible and makes sense of what happened. The enduring interest of many of Hegel's historical interpretations lies just in the fact that they do illuminate the interconnection of events enough to induce us to take them seriously, even if we have to transpose them (as most notoriously Marx did). But the imputation of purpose can never be self-authenticating as a starting point.

This problem besets Hegel's historical dialectics in general. The ontological ones start with a realized goal or standard. The initial task is to show that the object in question is to be understood in terms of the realization of a goal. Once this is secured, the dialectic

[1] I am here of course taking sides in the debate about explanation in history, for an interpretive view and against the 'covering law' model. For brevity's sake, I cannot undertake to argue my position here although I have tried to argue something like it in my 'Interpretation and the sciences of man', *Review of Metaphysics*, 35, 1 (Sept. 1971), 3–51. But the same point about Hegel's historical account could probably be made from the other perspective as well.

can proceed to define the goal. Since we know that the standard is met, we can set aside any conception of the goal which shows itself to be unrealizable. We can start with any definition, and by showing how it conflicts with its own fulfilment, move to more adequate conceptions until we reach the fully adequate one. Or to put the point another way, from the nature of the object under study we know certain of its criterial properties. We have only to learn what more exact specification of the purpose will in fact exhibit these properties.

But this cannot be the case with our historical dialectics. Prior to the total unfolding of history we have *ex hypothesi* no realized purpose before us. So we cannot treat any tract of history as a fulfilment whose operative standard we have to discover. Nor can we read from any tract of history with certainty even a general description of what man is ultimately aiming at. We cannot be sure of having gleaned even some criterial properties of man's ultimate fulfilment.

Thus it seems that just as we distinguished between ontological and historical dialectics as two kinds of dialectical development, so we have to distinguish two ways in which a dialectical exposition can command our assent. There are strict dialectics, whose starting point is or can reasonably claim to be undeniable. And then there are interpretive or hermeneutical dialectics, which convince us by the overall plausibility of the interpretations they give. It would seem that while Hegel has some candidates for the first category – most notably, the Logic – his historical dialectics fall in the second category. They do not convince by strict argument, but by the plausibility of their interpretation.

What would Hegel say to this? Would he admit a distinction of this kind? Certainly not in the form presented here. And Hegel would never have agreed that any part of his system reposed on plausible interpretations as against strict argument, for this would be to abandon the conception of *Geist* as total rationality. But in another form, I believe the distinction does find a place in Hegel's system. Leaving aside the *PhG* for the moment, the final system of the *Encyclopaedia* starts with a strict dialectic, the Logic. This establishes that there is no independent finite being, but that all is held together in the Idea, the formula of rational necessity which creates its own external manifestation. This conclusion is then available for the succeeding dialectics of the Philosophies of Nature and Spirit. And Hegel does in fact draw on it in these dialectics.

Hence we could say that for Hegel certainty about the purposes

of history, which could not be drawn in any form from its earliest periods, and which could only be gleaned with greater or lesser plausibility from the entire drama, can nevertheless be gained even for our examination of its beginnings, because these purposes are established previously by a strict dialectic. They are thus available as certain starting points for our understanding of history, and the ensuing dialectic can be said to flow with absolute certainty.

Thus in his introductory lectures to the Philosophy of History, Hegel speaks of the principles 'that Reason rules the world' (*VG*, 28) and that the final purpose of the world is the actualization of freedom (ibid. 63), as having to be presupposed in the study of history, but as having been 'proved in philosophy' (ibid. 28). It is clear that Hegel is referring here to the Logic, since the theses which are deemed to be proved concern the Idea, the culminating concept of this work. Its results are thus an 'input' into the Philosophy of History. They are the presuppositions which enable it to begin.

But immediately after this passage, Hegel says of the belief that there is Reason in history that 'It is not simply a presupposition of study; it is a result which happens to be known to myself because I already know the whole. Therefore, only the study of the world history itself can show that it has proceeded rationally, that it represents the rationally necessary course of the World Spirit' (*VG*, 30).[1] And he goes on: 'History itself must be taken as it is; we have to proceed historically, empirically.'

This passage implies that there is another way of showing that Reason is at work in history than the strict conceptual proof of the Logic. And this is by examining the whole of history, 'as it is... empirically'. Is this perhaps a partial recognition that there are two different kinds of proof of a thesis, one a strict proof which builds from an undeniable starting point, and the other an 'empirical' one which draws it from an examination of the whole as the only conclusion which makes sense of this whole?[2]

The strict philosophical proof would then be a presupposition for the study of history in this sense, that it makes us look at history

[1] *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (New York, 1953), 30. I have slightly amended the translation.

[2] This is perhaps what was meant in the sentence in the introduction of the Philosophy of History (*VG*, 29) which says that the presence of reason in world history is a truth which has its 'proper proof [*eigentlicher Beweis*] in the knowledge of reason itself', whereas 'world history only gives a convincing exposition of it' (*in der Weltgeschichte erweist sie sich nur*). But we cannot build too much on this passage. It is drawn not from Hegel's own notes but from those taken by hearers at his lectures.

with the eye of reason. And this is necessary, because in order to know what is substantial in history 'one must bring to it the consciousness of reason, no mere physical eye or finite understanding, but the eye of the Concept, of reason, which presses through the surface and struggles through and beyond the manifold, motley tumult of events [*die Mannigfaltigkeit des bunten Gewühls der Begebenheiten*]' (*VG*, 32). But once we look at it in this way, we have a coherence, a convincing explanation of history's course, which provides independent proof of the thesis that Reason rules the world.

If I am right that Hegel draws on the conclusions of the Logic for the dialectics which come 'after' it in the system, then we still have to distinguish in his work between dialectical arguments that are self-authenticating and stand on their own, because they start from an undeniable beginning, and those which are dependent on others, which have to make use of the conclusion of others to authenticate their readings. What we have called 'strict' dialectics would be self-authenticating in this sense, and what we have called 'interpretive' would be dependent. And what we have called 'historical' dialectics (as well as the philosophy of nature) would fall into the dependent category.

9. A FAULTY PROOF

What are we to think of Hegel's dialectical arguments? Does he succeed in showing the contradiction in finite things? It will not surprise the contemporary reader to learn that Hegel's demonstration is not in the end really convincing.

As I said at the beginning of the previous section, there isn't space to go into the detail of Hegel's demonstrations, much less to show exactly where they work or fail to work. But this much can be gleaned from what has been said; the demonstrations will stand or fall with the validity of the strict dialectics. And in fact, since the *PhG* suffers from a number of flaws in this regard, the crucial work for Hegel's whole system as a tissue of argument is the *Logic*. This is indeed why Hegel spent so much time on it, was concerned to redo it so many times, and expressed continuing dissatisfaction with his formulations of it.

It is in the *Logic*, more particularly in its first book, that Hegel really attempts to demonstrate the contradiction or ontological conflict in finite things, which is the key to his whole ontological vision. It is ultimately this which has to be shown, as we saw above,

if the ascending dialectic is to work, and if we are to prove that partial realities can only exist as emanations of Spirit.

This is to be shown in the following way. Hegel's *Logic* attempts to reveal the inadequacy of all our categorial concepts, as I explained in the previous section; that they fail to characterize reality as they claim to do or, alternatively put, that reality as characterized by them couldn't properly exist. But he also claims to show that these same inadequate concepts must have application, and hence that it is the real that they apply to which suffers the inadequacy, and which cannot properly exist, that is, maintain itself in existence.

In other words the *indispensable* categorial concepts, those which describe reality as it *must* be, also describe it as it *cannot* be, or at least cannot continue in being; so that the contradiction, Hegel holds, is in reality.

The crucial proof of this contradiction *in re* comes in Hegel's discussion of the category of *Dasein*, or determinate being. This is the category of which he believes that he can show that it is both indispensable and yet incoherent, and hence that whatever it applies to is in contradiction.

The proof of its indispensability comes in Hegel's famous dialectic of 'being' and 'nothing', which I briefly described in the previous section, where he shows that mere 'being' taken without further determination is an empty concept. To identify anything, we must pick it out by some determinate properties. Hence in order to be, something must be determinate.

Hegel then goes on to show that a determinate reality, as one which is essentially defined in contrast with other incompatible kinds of determinate reality which constitute its limits, contains its own negation, and hence is in contradiction with itself. But 'determinate being' is an indispensable concept; anything to be must be determinate. If it also contains its own negation, then whatever meets the conditions of existence also meets those of its own demise. Determinate or finite being is thus in contradiction; it destroys itself, is essentially mortal, and cannot maintain itself in existence.

This key argument fails to carry conviction to most contemporary philosophers. Certainly Hegel's arguments here would never convince an opponent. One would be more tempted to accord them the status that some moderns give Aquinas' proofs of the existence of God: they cannot be seen as irrefutable demonstrations, designed to convince the sceptic, but more as expressions of what the believer believes. Similarly, Hegel's proof of the contradiction of *Dasein* seems more of an incisive expression of his vision than a strict proof.

But this is not, of course, the way he saw it (any more than Thomas saw his proofs). We might say that the necessity of strict proof was even more integral to Hegel's system than to that of Thomas. Proof was not only necessary to convince others of a set of propositions which they might have believed by faith anyway, and which might quite well be true even though only objects of faith. *Geist*, whose embodiment was the world and whose nature was rational necessity, could not be an object of faith. Some self-consciousness of rational necessity, hence some strict proof of his own nature, was one of his necessary features. Consequently, the failure of the proofs of the *Logic* (unless replaced by others which achieve the same ends) would not just undermine our confidence in Hegel's system; such failure would refute it.

If then, as I say, Hegel's crucial proof in the *Logic* will not carry conviction today, and if this constitutes a refutation of his ontology, what interest can there be in studying his system? I want to turn to examine this question in the next chapter.

2

POLITICS AND ALIENATION

I. THE CONTINUING CONFLICT

To understand why Hegel's philosophy remains interesting and relevant today even though his ontology of *Geist* is close to incredible, we have to return to the discussion of the opening section.

I argued there that Hegel's work arose out of the attempt to combine the two aspirations of Romantic generation, the aspiration to radical autonomy on one hand, and to expressive unity with nature and within society on the other. But these two aspirations, and the hope of combining them, have remained important in our civilization.

This is not surprising. These two aspirations, as we saw, arose as reactions to the mainstream of Enlightenment thought and sensibility. This was utilitarian in its ethical outlook, and atomistic in its social philosophy. It looked on nature and society as having only instrumental significance; they were seen as potential means to the satisfaction of human desire and nothing more. And its hope was to bring men happiness through perfect mutual adjustment by reorganizing man and society according to the principles of a scientific social engineering.

But the industrial, technological and rationalized civilization which has grown up since the eighteenth century has in an important sense entrenched in its practices and institutions the conception of man which belonged to the main trend of the Enlightenment. And this, as it were, against the protests of Romanticism, which combined within itself in one form or another both the expressivist and the autonomist currents of reaction to the Enlightenment. The technology of industrial society pushes to a more and more extensive subjugation of nature. But what is much more important, industrial civilization has enforced repeated reorganizations of society and men's way of life in the name of efficiency and higher production. Urbanization, factory production, depopulation of the countryside and sometimes whole regions, mass emigration, the imposition of a

rationalized, rigidly measured pace of life at the expense of the former seasonal rhythm; all these changes and others, whether induced by planning or arising through the hazards of the market and investment patterns, are explained and justified by their greater efficacy in meeting the goals of production. In this respect the utilitarian conception is entrenched in our practices and institutions; it is a mode of thought in which different ways of living together are assessed not by some supposed intrinsic value, and certainly not by their expressive significance, but by their efficiency in the production of benefits which are ultimately 'consumed' by individuals. In this civilization social relations and practices, as well as nature, are progressively objectified.

This instrumental mode of evaluation is endemic to the institutions of a modern industrial economy; the activities which define these institutions relate them to an external purpose like profit, efficient production or growth. And all advanced industrial societies are marked by this, even the Soviet Union, where consumer satisfaction is sacrificed in the name of some other extrinsic goal, such as national security, or 'surpassing capitalism', or future satisfaction. This may not have to be so, and China, for instance, may realize another model where economic considerations in this sense are not ultimate. But they have been in industrial civilization to date.

And in the West, many of the complementary conceptions of society which have been invoked to mitigate the harsher consequences of the capitalist economy have themselves been offshoots of the Enlightenment, for example notions of equality, of redistribution among individuals, of humanitarian defence of the weak. Of course, Romantic notions have also contributed to modern civilization. For instance the expressivist notion that each man's fulfilment is unique and cannot be foreseen, much less prescribed, by any other is an essential part of the contemporary belief in individual liberty. And we can see this connection in some of the recognized theorists of modern liberty, von Humboldt, de Tocqueville, J. S. Mill.

But the Romantic strain has been contained, as it were, in modern Western civilization. The major common institutions reflect rather the Enlightenment conception in their defining ideas. This is obviously true of the economic institutions. But it is as true of the growing, rationalized bureaucracies, and it is not much less so of the political structures, which are organized largely to produce collective decision out of the concatenation of individual decisions (through voting) and/or negotiation between groups. The major collective structures of an advanced industrial society tend to

appear at best as instruments of production or decision (at worst, as threatening oppressors), whose value must ultimately be measured in what impact they have on the plight of individuals. The influence of Romantic ideas has largely been on the definition of individual fulfilment, for the sake of which these larger structures operate.

Modern civilization has thus seen the proliferation of Romantic views of private life and fulfilment, along with a growing rationalization and bureaucratization of collective structures, and a frankly exploitative stance towards nature. Modern society, we might say, is Romantic in its private and imaginative life and utilitarian or instrumentalist in its public, effective life. What is of ultimate importance in shaping the latter is not what its structures express, but what they get done. The bent of modern society is to treat these structures as a neutral, objectified domain, to be reorganized for maximum effect, although this may be held in check or even periodically overridden by powerful collective emotions, principally nationalism, which have their roots in the Romantic period. But the day-to-day predominance of these collective structures over private Romanticism is evident in the exploitation of Romantic images of fulfilment to keep the wheels of industry turning, for instance in much contemporary advertising.

It is not surprising, therefore, if protests against the bent of modern industrial society have taken up in different ways these two basic aspirations whose first synthesis was what we know as Romanticism. This has been as true of protests from the Left as it has been of those from the Right. The Romantic origins of Fascism have been widely remarked, indeed perhaps too facilely traced at times. But Marxism too incorporates in its own way, through its Hegelian parentage, the twin aspirations to radical autonomy and expressive unity, claimed now not on behalf of the individual, but of the 'generic being' (*Gattungswesen*) of man. I shall return to this below.

And we saw in the wave of 'New Left' and 'gauchiste' *contestations* which marked the end of the 1960s another attempt to break through the limits of a technological, bureaucratic, capitalist civilization through a synthesis of radical freedom and integral expression. Thus the hope of May 1968 in Paris was precisely to recover a radical freedom through breaking down the barriers between occupations (students and workers) and between different dimensions of life: work and play, art and everyday life, intellectual and manual labour. This demand for *décloisonnement* is directly in the expressivist tradition, and its origin is already evident in Herder's refusal of the

analytic divisions of reason and sensibility, body and soul, which were central to the Enlightenment conceptions of man.

Because of this continuing tension in our civilization the writings, music and art of the Romantic period still have a powerful appeal to us. And it is for the same reason that Hegel's philosophy is relevant and important.

Indeed, it is relevant in a way that Romantic thinkers cannot be. For Hegel not only took up the twin aspirations of Romanticism, but insisted on realizing them in a way which was fully transparent to reason. This is, of course, why we do not consider Hegel a Romantic; in his insistence on the essential role of reason he was just as much an heir of the Enlightenment. But the tension in our civilization today comes from the fact that we cannot and do not want totally to abandon the rational, technological bent of our society which comes from the Enlightenment, while we constantly feel the appeal of the aspirations to radical autonomy and expressive unity. A thinker who tried to combine all three thus has something to say to us that the mere protagonists of Romantic rebellion do not.

Hegel is important today because we recurrently feel the need for a critique of the illusions and distortions of perspective which spring from the atomistic, utilitarian, instrumental conceptions of man and nature, while at the same time puncturing the Romantic counter-illusions they continually generate. It is because Hegel is constantly engaged in doing just this, and with an exceptional depth and penetration of insight, that he has something to say to us even though his own ontology of the necessary unfolding of reason may seem as illusory to us as some of the doctrines he attacks.

In the following pages I would like to try, first, to illustrate this point in relation to Hegel's philosophy of history and politics. And then I shall turn to examine some of the reasons for this paradoxical situation; why Hegel's philosophy is at once incredible and highly relevant for us. This will bring us inevitably to an important issue about the nature of freedom.

2. THE DEMANDS OF REASON

Hegel's philosophy of history and politics is grounded in his ontological vision. He developed from this a certain conception of the direction of history and of the shape of the fully realized state. I want now to examine his philosophy in this context before returning to the issue of Hegel's importance today.

The goal towards which everything tends is, as we saw in chapter

I, the self-comprehension of Spirit or Reason. Man is the vehicle of this self-comprehension. But of course the full realization of absolute spirit presupposes a certain development of man in history. Man starts off as an immediate being, sunk in his particular needs and drives, with only the haziest, most primitive sense of the universal. This is another way of putting the point that Spirit is initially divided from itself, and has yet to return to itself. If man is to rise to the point where he can be the vehicle of this return, he has to be transformed, to undergo a long cultivation or formation (*Bildung*).

But this cannot just be an alteration of his outlook. By the principle of embodiment, any spiritual reality must be externally realized in time and space, so we know that any spiritual change requires a change of the relevant bodily expression. In this case, Spirit can only return to itself through the transformation of man's form of life in history.

What then is the form of life which man must attain in order to be an adequate vehicle of Spirit? First of all, this must be a social form. We saw in chapter I how the existence of finite spirits, in the plural, was part of the necessary plan of *Geist*. Thus in order to know itself in the world, Spirit has to bring about an adequate embodiment in human life in which it can recognize itself. 'The goal of world history is that Spirit come to a knowledge of what it truly is, that it give this knowledge objective expression [*dies Wissen gegenständlich mache*], realize it in a world which lies before it, in short, produce itself as an object for itself [*sich als objectiv hervorbringe*]' (*VG*, 74). That is why the state as the highest articulation of society has a touch of the divine in Hegel's eyes. In order to realize God's (Spirit's) fulfilment, man has to come to a vision of himself as part of a larger life. And that requires that as a living being he be in fact integrated into a larger life. The state is the real expression of that universal life which is the necessary embodiment (it would not be inappropriate to say 'material base') for the vision of the *Absolute*. In other words, it is essential to God's progress through the world that the state be, if I may be permitted to render the spirit of that famous line of *PR* whose mistranslation has caused so much trouble.[1]

But, of course, the state as it starts off in history is a very imperfect

[1] Es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, daß der Staat ist (addition to *PR*, §258). This was first mistranslated as 'The state is the march of God through the world', and this has been frequently quoted as a *pièce à conviction* in the indictment o Hegel as an anti-liberal apologist of 'Prussianism'. For the mistranslations and their effect, see W. Kaufmann's introduction to the book he edited, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*, New York: Atherton Press, 1970.

embodiment of the universal. Not just any state will do. The fully adequate state which Spirit needs to return to itself must be a fully *rational* one. Hegel's use of 'reason' in this context was quite original, and it will help to make this clear if we try to situate it in relation to the important landmarks of the tradition of practical reason.

One recognized form of the appeal to reason is that which goes back to Plato. Here 'reason' is understood as the power by which we see the true structure of things, the world of the Ideas. To act according to reason is to act according to this true structure, and is equivalent to acting according to nature.

Now this view was based on the idea that there is a larger rational order to which man essentially belongs. For if man is rational life, and to be rational is to be connected to this larger order in having a true vision of it, then man can only be himself in being so connected to this order. An important aspect of the seventeenth-century revolution was its rejection of this conception of the order in which man inheres in favour of the idea of a self-defining subject.

But this new view gave rise to a new conception of order, and hence a new kind of appeal to reason and nature. Man was now defined as a subject capable of rational thought and decision, and also as the subject of certain desires. An important strand of modern thought, in contrast to the tradition from Plato and Aristotle, takes these desires as given for moral reasoning; they cannot themselves be judged at the bar of reason. One of the most important early protagonists of this view is Hobbes, and it is continued in the utilitarian thinkers of the eighteenth century. Reason now comes to mean 'reckoning' and practical reason is the intelligent calculation of how to encompass ends which are beyond the arbitration of reason.

This was one side of Hobbes's legacy. Reason and nature were dethroned as the ultimate criteria. There was no longer a normative order of things evident in nature of which man was a part, such that the ground of obligation could be found in nature. Rather, political obligation was grounded in a decision, to submit to a sovereign, dictated by prudence (calculating reason). For a self-defining subject, obligation could only be created by his own will. Hence the great importance of the myth of the original contract.

But this new view could also be presented in another way. Man as a subject of desires had one great second-order goal, that the first-order desires be satisfied. Their satisfaction was what was meant by 'happiness' (Hobbes's 'felicity') which was therefore given a quite different meaning than it had in the Aristotelian tradition.

But then, whatever effect education (artifice) had in shaping the detail of our first-order desires, one could say that by nature and inescapably men desire happiness.

Now if intelligent calculation can show how to shape men and circumstances so that men achieve happiness, and all of them achieve it together and compatibly with each other, then is this not the highest goal, and one that is according to reason (intelligent calculation) and nature (the universal desire for happiness)?

There is a new conception of order here. Instead of seeing nature as expressing a meaningful order, one which has to be accounted for in terms of Ideas, we see it as a set of interlocking elements whose relations can be explained in terms of efficient causation. The order (as against disorder) in things does not consist in their embodying the underlying Ideas, but rather in their *meshing* without conflict and distortion. Applied to the human realm, this means that man comes to realize natural order when the company of desiring subjects comes to achieve full satisfaction (happiness), each compatibly with all the others. The perfect harmony of desires is the goal which nature and reason prescribe to man.

But a third conception of reason as criterion of action arose to challenge the utilitarian view in the late eighteenth century, and that was the radical moral autonomy of Kant. This view starts in a sense with Rousseau, to whom Hegel gives credit for it. It is a reaction against the utilitarian identification of good with interest and of reason with calculation. It wants to found our obligation on the will, but in a much more radical sense than Hobbes. Hobbes grounded political obligation on a decision to submit to a sovereign. But this decision was dictated by prudence, so that we can see the ground of obligation in Hobbes as the universal desire to avoid death. Hence the 'first law of nature', which is 'to endeavour peace'. In the end certain natural facts about us, our desires and aversions, have a decisive part in deciding what we ought to do, as far as the utilitarian tradition is concerned.

The aim of Kant was to cut loose altogether from this reliance on nature, and to draw the content of obligation purely from the will. This he proposed to do by applying a purely formal criterion to prospective actions, which was binding on the will as rational. Rationality involves thinking in universal terms and thinking consistently. Hence the maxim underlying any proposed action must be such that we can universalize it without contradiction. If we cannot do this, then we cannot as rational wills conscientiously undertake this action. A will operating on this principle would be

free from any ground of determination (*Bestimmungsgrund*) in nature and hence truly free.[1] A moral subject is thus autonomous in a radical sense. He obeys only the dictates of his own will. Reason, as rational will, is now the criterion, but in a third sense, one opposed to nature.

Now Hegel builds on the whole development which we have sketched here. He will reconstruct the notion of a greater order to which man belongs, but on an entirely new basis. Hence he fully endorses the modern rejection of the meaningful order of nature, as seen in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. These visions of order saw it as ultimately just given by God. The hierarchy of beings was an ultimate which could not be further explained or justified, and it was incumbent on man to take his proper place in this hierarchy. But the Hegelian notion of Spirit as freedom cannot accommodate anything merely given, as we saw. Everything must flow of necessity from the Idea, from Spirit or Reason itself. Hence Spirit must ultimately rebel against anything merely given.

For this reason, Hegel sees the modern affirmation of a self-defining subject as a necessary stage. And he sees its necessary culmination in the radical Kantian notion of autonomy. Autonomy expresses the demand of Spirit to deduce its whole content out of itself, not to accept as binding anything which is merely taken up from outside. 'In order to know what is truly right, we have to abstract from inclination, impulse, desire, as from everything particular: we must know, in other words, what the will is as such [*an sich*]' (*GW*, 921), and further 'the will is only free, in so far as it wills nothing other, external, foreign – for then it would be dependent – but only wills itself, the will' (loc. cit.). He takes up the radical contrast between nature and Spirit. The 'substance' of material nature is gravity, but that of Spirit is freedom (*VG*, 55).[2] Its freedom is to be centred on itself (*in sich den Mittelpunkt zu haben*).

The very notion of will is bound up with that of freedom. First, thought is essential to the will. It is its 'substance', 'so that without thought there can be no will' (*EG*, §468, addition).

It is because it is the practical expression of thought that the will is essentially destined to be free. 'Freedom is precisely thought itself; whoever rejects thought and speaks of freedom doesn't know

[1] *Critique of Practical Reason*, §5.

[2] Of course, 'nature' can also be used in a different sense, in which we mean the concept of a thing, in which case, there is a 'nature' of Spirit. Hegel uses this expression in the passage just referred to: 'Die Natur des Geistes. . .' This shows the filiation of Hegel's thought to Aristotle's, in spite of, or rather beyond, his espousal of the modern radical autonomy.

what he's saying. The unity of thought with itself is freedom, the free will. . . The will is only free as thinking will' (*SW*, XIX, 528–9).

In *PR* he takes up the same theme, and characterizes the will as 'self-determining universality', and hence as freedom (§21). It is 'thinking getting its own way in the will'. Hegel here repeats that 'it is only as thinking intelligence that the will is genuinely a will and free'. In the course of the same note to this paragraph, he takes a swipe at Romantic theories of freedom which 'would banish thought and have recourse instead to feeling, enthusiasm, the heart and the breast'. This free will is also truly infinite, since its object is not an other or a barrier for it (§22). It is 'released from every tie of dependence on anything else' (§23), and it is universal (§24).

This will, which is determined purely by itself, and hence by thought or rationality, is the ultimate criterion of what is right. It is designated the 'ground of right' (*der Boden des Rechts*) in *PR* (§4). And therefore it is the basic principle of the fully realized state. Rousseau is given the credit for having been the first to seize this crucial principle: 'by adducing the will as the principle of the state, he is adducing a principle which has thought both for its form and its content, a principle indeed which is thinking itself, and not a principle, like gregarious instinct, for instance, or divine authority, which has thought as its form only' (*PR*, §258). But while building on Kant, Hegel gives this principle of autonomy an entirely new twist. He generates out of it a new variant of the larger order which this modern consciousness started off by rejecting. In this way, he believes himself to have overcome the grievous dilemma which Kant's theory runs into.

The problem with Kant's criterion of rationality is that it has purchased radical autonomy at the price of emptiness. Once it is explained to us, we can see how the Platonic criterion of reason works to select some things as right and others as wrong, even though we may disagree with it, and reject its whole ontological base. The same goes for the utilitarian criterion. But Kant attempted to avoid any appeal to the way things are, either to an order of ideas or a constellation of *de facto* desires. The criterion of the right is to be purely formal. Kant believed that this gave him a viable theory because he thought that the formal criterion would actually rule some actions in and others out. But the arguments to this effect are very shaky, and once one loses faith in them, one is left with a criterion which has no bite at all, which can allow anything as a morally possible action. Moral autonomy has been purchased at the price of vacuity.

This is a criticism that Hegel never tires of addressing to Kant. But he claims to resolve Kant's dilemma, because he will show how the concrete content of duty is deduced from the very idea of freedom itself. But before going on to see this in greater detail we should note how this reproach of vacuity was central to Hegel's critique of Kant, and of the whole revolutionary age.

Because he only has a formal notion of freedom, Kant cannot derive his notion of the polity from it. His political theory ends up borrowing from the utilitarians. Its input, we might say, is the utilitarian vision of a society of individuals each seeking happiness in his own way. The problem of politics is to find a way of limiting the negative freedom (*Willkür*) of each so that it can coexist with that of all others under a universal law. In other words Kant's radical notion of freedom, being purely formal and therefore vacuous, cannot generate a new substantive vision of the polity in which it would be realized, one founded on goals derived intrinsically from the nature of the will itself ('*der Wille . . . als an und für sich seiender, vernünftiger . . .*'), which would thus be unconditionally valid for men. So Kant's political theory has to borrow its content from nature, as it were. It takes its start from men as individuals seeking particular goals, and the demands of morality and rationality, i.e. universality, only enter as restrictions and limitations (*Beschränkungen*) imposed on these individuals from outside. Rationality is not immanent, but an external, formal universality which demands only that the negative freedom of all individuals be made compatible (*PR*, §29).

Thus although Kant starts with a radically new conception of morality, his political theory is disappointingly familiar. It does not take us very far beyond utilitarianism, in that its main problem remains that of harmonizing individual wills.

This is undoubtedly a little unfair to Kant, as we shall note later on. But it seems even unfairer to Rousseau who is lumped together with Kant as the target of the same criticism, both in this paragraph (§29) and elsewhere.[1] In §258, Hegel complains that Rousseau sees will still as individual will, and thinks of the general will not as 'the absolutely rational element in the will' (*das an und für sich Vernünftige des Willens*), but only as the common element (*das Gemeinschaftliche*) which emerges from the conscious individual wills. The result is that the state is ultimately based on arbitrary decisions and consent (*Willkür, Meinung und beliebige, ausdrückliche Einwilligung*).

[1] Cf. *PR*, §258; *SW*, XIX, 528.

As it stands this certainly fails to do justice to Rousseau. His *volonté générale* was certainly meant to be more and other than the common element of everyone's particular will, and the task of the contract was not to bring these particular wills into agreement. But a clue to what Hegel is driving at is provided by the reference in both paragraphs (§§29, 258) to the fearful destruction wrought by the French Revolution, which here as elsewhere Hegel sees as following logically on the principles of Rousseau.

For in fact the vacuity of formal freedom can have another quite different outcome than the one ascribed above to Kant. There we saw the theory of autonomy having to fall back on utilitarianism to define the problem of political life. But it is possible for theorists of radical autonomy to feel this lack themselves, and to yearn for a society which would go beyond the struggle and compromise of particular wills and attain an integral expression of freedom. This is the drive for 'absolute freedom' which Hegel described in the *PhG* and which he saw in the Jacobin period of Revolutionary terror.

But the curse of vacuity haunts this enterprise as well. Its aim is to found society on no particular interest or traditional positive principle, but on freedom alone. But this, being empty, gives no basis for a new articulated structure of society. It only enjoins destruction of the existing articulations and any new ones which threaten to arise. The drive to absolute freedom thus becomes the fury of destruction, 'and the experiment ended in the maximum of frightfulness and terror' (§258).

It seems strange, however, to link this Terror, which sacrificed the individual to the general will, to a theory which is said still to define will as individual. But I think what Hegel was really driving at was something else, which was not very perspicuously put in these passages. It is that Rousseau and Kant, and both revolutionary and liberal protagonists of radical autonomy, all defined freedom as *human* freedom, the will as *human* will. Hegel on the other hand believed himself to have shown that man reaches his basic identity in seeing himself as a vehicle of *Geist*. If the substance of the will is thought or reason, and if the will is only free when it follows nothing else but its own thought, the thought or reason in question turns out not to be that of man alone, but rather that of the cosmic spirit which posits the universe.

This transforms the situation. The vacuity which bedevilled the theory of radical autonomy is overcome. The dilemma of radical freedom can be restated succinctly as follows: if freedom is to

renounce all heteronomy, any determination of the will by particular desires, traditional principle or external authority, then freedom seems incompatible with any rational action whatsoever. For there do not seem to be any grounds of action left which are not wholly vacuous, that is, which would actually rule some actions in and others out, and which are not also heteronomous.

But everything changes if the will whose autonomy men must realize is not that of man alone but of *Geist*. Its content is the Idea which produces a differentiated world out of itself. So that there is no longer a lack of determining grounds of action. To put this less succinctly, Hegel's free rational will escapes vacuity because unlike Kant's it does not remain merely universal but produces a particular content out of itself. But this is its prerogative as cosmic subject. It is the absolute Idea which deploys a differentiated world. Human rational will finds a content not by stripping itself of all particularity in the attempt to attain a freedom and universality which can only be formal, but by discovering its links to cosmic reason, and hence coming to discern what aspects of our lives as particular beings reflect the truly concrete universal which is the Idea. What reason and freedom enjoin on man's will is to further and sustain that structure of things which so reveals itself to be the adequate expression of the Idea.

This means first, as we saw above, that society must be such that men relate to it as to a larger life in which they are immersed. In other words, the demands of freedom on this reading take us beyond the atomistic forms of liberalism where the individual and his goals are of ultimate importance, and the task of society is to permit their fulfilment along with those of others.

And this in turn dictates a certain structure of society. It must be such that the various moments of the Concept, immediate unity, separation, and mediated unity, all reach full and compatible expression. In his *PR* Hegel gives concrete content to this seemingly abstract requirement, which is made the ground for the essential articulation of the state into 'estates' (*Stände*) and into levels of society (family, civil society, state).

The demands of reason are thus that men live in a state articulated according to the Concept, and that they relate to it not just as individuals whose interests are served by this collectively established machinery, but more essentially as participants in a larger life. And this larger life deserves their ultimate allegiance because it is the expression of the very foundation of things, the Concept. Freedom has been given a very concrete content indeed.

But in this Hegel has brought off an extraordinary *tour de force*. For this relation of man to society is parallel to the pre-modern one. Before the revolution of modern subjectivity men were induced to revere the structures of their society: monarchy, aristocracy, priestly hierarchy or whatever, on the grounds that these reflected the will of God or the order of being, in short, the foundation of things to which man owes ultimate allegiance. The king was to be obeyed because he was God's anointed; more, he was the expression in the polity of what God was in the universe. Now this mode of thought returns in the most surprising way, growing out of the most extreme expression of modern self-defining subjectivity, the radical notion of autonomy.

No wonder Hegel has been difficult to classify on the liberal/conservative spectrum. For he rehabilitates the notion of a cosmic order as a corner-stone of political theory; he speaks of the state as divine. And this kind of thing we think of as the hallmark of conservative, even reactionary thought. But this order is utterly unlike those of the tradition. There is nothing in it which is not transparently dictated by reason itself. It is thus not an order beyond man which he must simply accept. Rather it is one which flows from his own nature properly understood. Hence it is centred on autonomy, since to be governed by a law which emanates from oneself is to be free. The order thus gives a central place to the autonomous, rational individual. Hegel's political theory is quite without precedent or parallel. The attempt to classify it by picking out liberal or conservative shibboleths can just lead to laughable misinterpretations.[1]

Thus Hegel's answer to the vacuity of Kant's moral theory is to deduce the content of duty out of the idea of freedom. But this is a feasible operation because he is not talking of the idea of merely human freedom, but rather of the cosmic idea. From this he can derive the notion of the kind of society that men should belong to. It is this vision of society which then can give concrete content to moral obligation which enjoins us to further and sustain its structures and live according to its precepts. Morality is only given a content via the notion of a whole society. Thus 'An immanent and consistent "doctrine of duties" can be nothing except the serial exposition of the relationships which are necessitated by the Idea of freedom,

[1] These unfortunately abound in the Anglo-Saxon world. The latest one has been perpetrated by Sidney Hook. Cf. his contributions to the volume edited by Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*.

and are therefore realized across their whole extent, that is, in the state' (*PR*, §148).[1]

Hence rationality becomes a substantive criterion for Hegel both in morals and politics, and this in a manner original with him. His conception has some affinities with Plato, since it does involve the idea of a cosmic order. But it also owes a great deal to Kant, since it is built on the requirement of radical autonomy, that the will should obey nothing but itself, its own immanent rationality. It manages somehow, as we saw, to combine both, and in this its striking originality consists.

As the criterion of rationality actually applies to Hegel's politics, it is quite complex. It has some of its applications in common with Kant's. For in fact this latter is richer in its consequences for political theory than Hegel sometimes allows.[2]

First of all, rationality requires that man be treated as a rational subject, in Kant's formulation as an end, and not only as a means. And in political terms this means that the modern state must recognize the rights of the autonomous individual. It cannot accept slavery. It must respect property, conscience (*PR*, §137), the free choice of a career (§206), of religious confession (§270) and so on.

Secondly, rationality, even in its formal Kantian definition, requires that the state be ruled by law (*PR*, preface), and not by arbitrary caprice; and that the law treat all alike, which means that to the extent that it emanates from men at all it must in an important sense emanate from all alike.

These are the corollaries which flow from the liberal, Kantian criterion of rationality. Hegel adds to them his own, that political society should realize and express the Idea.

But we can still see the justice in Hegel's claim that Kant's criterion does not take us very far beyond the utilitarian Enlightenment. The first two principles tell us how individuals should be treated, and give us a general, formal characterization of the good society; that it should be based on law. But only the third, Hegel's criterion, enables us to derive the actual shape this society should take. Kant's moral theory remained at the edges of politics, as it were, setting limits beyond which states or individuals should not tread. For Hegel, in contrast, morality can only receive a concrete

[1] Knox translation, slightly amended.

[2] Kant's theory can in fact largely compensate for the vacuity of the universalizability criterion by certain other consequences of the aspiration to radical autonomy. For this also says something about the way men should be *treated*, and the kinds of rules they should be subject to.

content in politics, in the design of the society we have to further and sustain.

This set of obligations which we have to further and sustain a society founded on the Idea is what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*. This has been variously translated in English as 'ethical life', 'objective ethics', 'concrete ethics', but no translation can capture the sense of this term of art, and I propose to use the original here. *Sittlichkeit* is the usual German term for 'ethics', with the same kind of etymological origin, in the term *Sitten*, which we might translate 'customs'. But Hegel gives it a special sense, in contrast to *Moralität* (which of course has a parallel etymological origin in *mores*, although, being Latin, that would not be so evident to German readers).

Sittlichkeit refers to the moral obligations I have to an ongoing community of which I am part. These obligations are based on established norms and uses, and that is why the etymological root in *Sitten* is important for Hegel's use.[1] The crucial characteristic of *Sittlichkeit* is that it enjoins us to bring about what already is. This is a paradoxical way of putting it, but in fact the common life which is the basis of my *sittlich* obligation is already there in existence. It is in virtue of its being an ongoing affair that I have these obligations; and my fulfilment of these obligations is what sustains it and keeps it in being. Hence in *Sittlichkeit* there is no gap between what ought to be and what is, between *Sollen* and *Sein*.

With *Moralität* the opposite holds. Here we have an obligation to realize something which does not exist. What ought to be contrasts with what is. And connected with this, the obligation holds of me not in virtue of being part of a larger community life, but as an individual rational will.

Hegel's critique of Kant can then be put in this way: Kant identifies ethical obligation with *Moralität*,[2] and cannot get beyond this. For he presents an abstract, formal notion of moral obligation, which holds of man as an individual, and which being defined in contrast to nature is in endless opposition to what is.

We can see how all of Hegel's reproaches against Kant's moral philosophy are systematically connected. Because it remained with a purely formal notion of reason, it could not provide a content to moral obligation. Because it would not accept the only valid content, which comes from an ongoing society to which we belong, it remained an ethic of the individual. Because it shied away from

[1] Cf. *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. G. Lasson (Leipzig, 1923), 388.

[2] Once again, this is Hegel's term of art; Kant himself used the usual word *Sittlichkeit* in his works on ethics.

that larger life of which we are a part, it saw the right as for ever opposed to the real; morality and nature are always at loggerheads.

The doctrine of *Sittlichkeit* is that morality reaches its completion in a community. This both gives obligation its definitive content, as well as realizing it, so that the gap between *Sollen* and *Sein* is made up. Hegel started off, as we saw, following Kant in distinguishing will and freedom from nature. But the fulfilment of freedom is when nature (here society, which started in a raw, primitive form) is made over to the demands of reason.

Because the realization of the Idea requires that man be part of a larger life in a society, moral life reaches its highest realization in *Sittlichkeit.* This highest realization is an achievement, of course; it is not present throughout history; and there are even periods where public life has been so emptied of Spirit that *Moralität* expresses something higher. But the fulfilment of morality comes in a realized *Sittlichkeit.*

Full realization of freedom requires a society for the Aristotelian reason that a society is the minimum self-sufficient human reality. In putting *Sittlichkeit* at the apex Hegel is – consciously – following Aristotle; and in following Aristotle, the ancient Greek world. For the last time that the world saw an effortless and undivided *Sittlichkeit* was among the Greeks. Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* is in part a rendering of that expressive unity which his whole generation saw in the Greek *polis*, where – it was believed – men had seen the collective life of their city as the essence and meaning of their own lives, had sought their glory in its public life, their rewards in power and reputation within it, and immortality in its memory. It was his expression for that *vertu* which Montesquieu had seen as the mainspring of republics. In common with his generation he recognized that this *Sittlichkeit* was lost forever in its original form, but along with many of his contemporaries he aspired to see it reborn in a new way.

3. ETHICAL SUBSTANCE

The idea that our highest and most complete moral existence is one we can only attain to as members of a community obviously takes us beyond the contract theory of modern natural law, or the utilitarian conception of society as an instrument of the general happiness. For these societies are not the focus of independent obligations, let alone the highest claims which can be made on us. Their existence simply gives a particular shape to pre-existing moral obligations, for

example the keeping of promises, or the furtherance of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The doctrine which puts *Sittlichkeit* at the apex of moral life requires a notion of society as a larger community life, to recall the expression used above, in which man participates as a member.

Now this notion displaces the centre of gravity, as it were, from the individual on to the community, which is seen as the locus of a life or subjectivity, of which the individuals are phases. The community is an embodiment of *Geist*, and a fuller, more substantial embodiment than the individual. This idea of a subjective life beyond the individual has been the source of much resistance to Hegel's philosophy. For it has seemed to the common sense at least of the Anglo-Saxon world (nurtured by a certain philosophical tradition) as both wildly extravagant in a speculative sense, and morally very dangerous in its 'Prussian' or even 'Fascist' consequences, sacrificing the individual and his freedom on the altar of some 'higher' communal deity. Before going further, therefore, we should examine this notion of the society and the relation of individuals to it. We shall see, indeed, that Hegel's notion of objective *Geist* is not without difficulty; but the extravagance is not where the atomistic mentality of the empiricist world thought it was.

Hegel uses a number of terms to characterize this relation of man to the community. One of the most common is 'substance'. The state, or the people, is the 'substance' of individuals. This idea is clearly expressed in the *Encyclopaedia*.

> The substance which knows itself free, in which absolute '*Ought*' is equally well *being*, has reality as the spirit of a *people*. The abstract diremption of this spirit is the individuation into persons, of whose independent existence Spirit is the inner power and necessity. But the person as thinking intelligence knows this substance as his own essence – in this conviction [*Gesinnung*] he ceases to be a mere accident of it – rather he looks on it as his absolute and final goal existing in reality, as something which is attained in the *here and now*, while at the same time he *brings it about through his activity*, but as something which in fact simply is. (*EG*, §514)[1]

We can notice here at the end a reference to that basic feature of *Sittlichkeit*, that it provides a goal which is at the same time already realized, which is brought about, and yet is. But what is worth noticing here is the set of related concepts which help to explain 'substance'. The community, says Hegel, is also 'essence', and also 'final goal' for the individuals.

The notion behind 'substance' and 'essence' is that the individuals

[1] Cf. also *PR*, §§145, 156, 258.

only are what they are by their inherence in the community. This idea is put in a passage of *VG*: 'Everything that man is he owes to the state; only in it can he find his essence. All value that a man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the state' (111). Or more directly: 'the individual is an individual in this substance... No individual can step beyond [it]; he can separate himself certainly from other particular individuals, but not from the *Volksgeist*' (*VG*, 59–60).

The notion behind 'final goal' (*Endzweck*) seems to be more sinister, for it seems to imply that individuals only exist to serve the state as some pitiless Moloch. This seems even more clearly to be the message of *PR*, §258: 'this substantial unity is an absolute unmoved end in itself, in which freedom comes into its supreme right. On the other hand this final end has supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state.' But this reading is based on a serious misinterpretation. Hegel denies that the state exists for the individuals; in other words he rejects the Enlightenment utilitarian idea that the state has only an instrumental function, that the ends it must serve are those of individuals. But he cannot really accept the inverse proposition.

> The state is not there for the sake of the citizens; one could say, it is the goal and they are its instruments. But this relation of ends and means is quite inappropriate here. For the state is not something abstract, standing over against the citizens; but rather they are moments as in organic life, where no member is end and none means . . . The essence of the state is ethical life [*die sittliche Lebendigkeit*]. (*VG*, 112)

Rather we see here that the notion of ends and means gives way to the image of a living being. The state or the community has a higher life; its parts are related as the parts of an organism.[1] Thus the individual is not serving an end separate from him; rather he is serving a larger goal which is the ground of his identity, for he only is the individual he is in this larger life. We have gone beyond the opposition of self-goal and other-goal.

Hegel adds to this notion of the community as living that of the community as 'self-consciousness'. And it is this, together with the use of the words *Geist* and *Volksgeist*, which has given rise to the idea that the Hegelian state or community is a super-individual. But in the passage of *VG* where he introduces the term 'self-consciousness', Hegel makes clear that he is not talking about it in connection with *Volksgeister* in the sense that it applies to individuals.

[1] In the language of the *Logic*, the category of External Teleology is inadequate here. The state can only be understood by Internal Teleology.

Rather it is a 'philosophical concept' (61). Like any *Geist* larger than the individual it only has existence through the vehicle of individual concrete subjects.[1] It is thus not a subject like them.

But why does Hegel want to speak of a spirit which is larger than the individual? What does it mean to say that the individual is part of, inheres in, a larger life, and that he is only what he is by doing so?

These ideas only appear mysterious because of the powerful hold on us of atomistic prejudices, which have been very important in modern political thought and culture. We can think that the individual is what he is in abstraction from his community only if we are thinking of him *qua* organism. However, when we think of a human being we do not simply mean a living organism, but a being who can think, feel, decide, be moved, respond, enter into relations with others; and all this implies a language, a related set of ways of experiencing the world, of interpreting his feelings, understanding his relation to others, to the past, the future, the absolute and so on. It is the particular way he situates himself within this cultural world that we call his identity.

But now a language, and the related set of distinctions underlying our experience and interpretation, is something that can only grow in and be sustained by a community. In that sense, what we are as human beings we are only in a cultural community. Perhaps once we have fully grown up in a culture we can leave it and still retain much of it. But this kind of case is exceptional, and in an important sense marginal. Emigrés cannot fully live their culture, and are always forced to take on something of the ways of the new society they have entered. The life of a language and culture is one whose locus is larger than that of the individual. It happens in the community. The individual possesses this culture, and hence his identity, by participating in this larger life.

When I say that a language and the related distinctions can only be sustained by a community, I am not thinking only of language as a medium of communication; so that our experience could be entirely private and just need a public medium to be communicated from one to another. Rather the fact is that our experience is what it is, is shaped in part, by the way we interpret it; and this has a lot to do with the terms which are available to us in our culture. But there is more; many of our most important experiences would be impossible outside of society, for they relate to objects which are

[1] Thus in *PR*, §258, Hegel speaks of the state possessing 'the actuality of the substantial will . . . in *the particular self-consciousness* once that consciousness has been raised to consciousness of its universality' (my italics).

social. Such are, for instance, the experience of participating in a rite, or of taking part in the political life of our society, or of rejoicing at the victory of the home team, or of national mourning for a dead hero; and so on. All these experiences and emotions have objects which are essentially social and would not be outside of (this) society.

So the culture which lives in our society shapes our private experience and constitutes our public experience, which in turn interacts profoundly with the private. So that it is no extravagant proposition to say that we are what we are in virtue of participating in the larger life of our society – or at least being immersed in it, if our relationship to it is unconscious and passive, as is often the case.

But of course Hegel is saying something more than this. For this inescapable relation to the culture of my society does not rule out the most extreme alienation. This comes about when the public experience of my society ceases to have any meaning for me.

Far from wishing to deny this possibility, Hegel was one of the first to develop a theory of alienation. The point is that the objects of public experience – rite, festival, election etc. – are not like facts of nature. For they are not entirely separable from the experience they give rise to. They are partly constituted by the ideas and interpretations which underlie them. A given social practice, like voting in the ecclesia, or in a modern election, is what it is because of a set of commonly understood ideas and meanings, by which the depositing of stones in an urn, or the marking of bits of paper, counts as the making of a social decision. These ideas about what is going on are essential to define the institution. They are essential if there is to be *voting* here, and not some quite other activity which could be carried on by putting stones in the urns.

Now these ideas are not universally acceptable or even understandable. They involve a certain view of man, society and decision, for instance, which may seem evil or unintelligible to other societies. To take a social decision by voting implies that it is right, appropriate and intelligible to build the community decision out of a concatenation of individual decisions. In some societies, like many traditional village societies throughout the world, social decisions can (could) only be taken by consensus. An atomistic decision procedure of this kind is tantamount to dissolving the social bond. Whatever else it is it could not be a *social* decision.

Thus a certain view of man and his relation to society is embedded in some of the practices and institutions of a society. So that we can

think of these as expressing certain ideas. And indeed, they may be the only, or the most adequate expression of these ideas, if the society has not developed a relatively articulate and accurate theory about itself. The ideas which underlie a certain practice and make it what it is, for example those which make the marking of papers the taking of a social decision, may not be spelled out adequately in propositions about man, will, society and so on. Indeed, an adequate theoretical language may be as yet undeveloped.

In this sense we can think of the institutions and practices of a society as a kind of language in which its fundamental ideas are expressed. But what is 'said' in this language is not ideas which could be in the minds of certain individuals only; they are rather common to a society, because embedded in its collective life, in practices and institutions which are of the society indivisibly. In these the spirit of the society is in a sense objectified. They are, to use Hegel's term, 'objective spirit'.

These institutions and practices make up the public life of a society. Certain norms are implicit in them, which they demand to be maintained and properly lived out. Because of what voting is as a concatenating procedure of social decision, certain norms about falsification, the autonomy of the individual decision etc. flow inescapably from it. The norms of a society's public life are the content of *Sittlichkeit*.

We can now see better what Hegel means when he speaks of the norms or ends of society as sustained by our action, and yet as already there, so that the member of society 'brings them about through his activity, but as something which rather simply is' (*EG*, §514). For these practices and institutions are maintained only by ongoing human activity, and must be, for it is only the ongoing practice which defines what the norm is our future action must seek to sustain. This is especially the case if there is as yet no theoretical formulation of the norm, as there was not in Hegel's view in the Greek city states at their apogee. The Athenian acted 'as it were, out of instinct' (*VG*, 115), his *Sittlichkeit* was a 'second nature'. But even if there is a theory, it cannot substitute for the practice as a criterion, for it is unlikely that any formulation can entirely render what is involved in a social practice of this kind.

Societies refer to theoretical 'value' formulations as their norms rather than to practices, when they are trying to meet an unrealized standard for example to 'build socialism' or become fully 'democratic'. But these goals are, of course, of the domain of *Moralität*. *Sittlichkeit* presupposes that the living practices are an adequate

'statement' of the basic norms, although in the limiting case of the modern philosophy of the state, Hegel sees the theoretical formulation as catching up. Hence we see the importance of Hegel's insistence that the end sought by the highest ethics is already realized. It means that the highest norms are to be discovered in the real, that the real is rational, and that we are to turn away from chimaeric attempts to construct a new society from a blueprint. Hegel strongly opposes those who hold

> that a philosophy of state . . . [has] . . . the task of discovering and promulgating still another theory . . . In examining this idea and the activity in conformity with it, we might suppose that no state or constitution has ever existed in the world at all, but that nowadays . . . we had to start all over again from the beginning, and that the ethical world had just been waiting for such present-day projects, proofs and investigations. (preface to *PR*, 4)

The happiest, unalienated life for man, which the Greeks enjoyed, is where the norms and ends expressed in the public life of a society are the most important ones by which its members define their identity as human beings. For then the institutional matrix in which they cannot help living is not felt to be foreign. Rather it is the essence, the 'substance' of the self. 'Thus in universal spirit each man has self-certainty, the certainty that he will find nothing other in existing reality than himself' (*PhG*, 258). And because this substance is sustained by the activity of the citizens, they see it as their work. 'This substance is also the universal work [*Werk*], which creates itself through the action of each and all as their unity and equality, because it is Being-for-self [*Fürsichsein*], the self, the act of doing [*das Tun*]' (*PhG*, 314). To live in a state of this kind is to be free. The opposition between social necessity and individual freedom disappears. 'The rational is necessary as what belongs to substance, and we are free in so far as we recognize it as law and follow it as the substance of our own essence; objective and subjective will are then reconciled and form one and the same untroubled whole' (*VG*, 115).

But alienation arises when the goals, norms or ends which define the common practices or institutions begin to seem irrelevant or even monstrous, or when the norms are redefined so that the practices appear a travesty of them. A number of public religious practices have suffered the first fate in history; they have 'gone dead' on subsequent generations, and may even be seen as irrational or blasphemous. To the extent that they remain part of the public ritual there is widespread alienation in society – we can think of contemporary societies like Spain, which remains officially Catholic

while a good part of the population is rabidly anti-clerical; or communist societies, which have a public religion of atheism, even though many of their citizens believe in God.

But the democratic practices of Western society seem to be suffering something like the second fate in our time. Many people can no longer accept the legitimacy of voting and the surrounding institutions, elections, parliaments etc., as vehicles of social decision. They have redrawn their conception of the relation of individual to society, so that the mediation and distance which any large-scale voting system produces between individual decision and social outcome seems unacceptable. Nothing can claim to be a real social decision which is not arrived at in a full and intense discussion in which all participants are fully conscious of what is at stake. Decisions made by elected representatives are branded as sham, as manipulation masquerading as consensus. With this redefinition of the norm of collective decision (that is, of a decision made *by* people and not just for them), our present representative institutions begin to be portrayed as an imposture; and a substantial proportion of the population is alienated from them.

In either case, norms as expressed in public practices cease to hold our allegiance. They are either seen as irrelevant or are decried as usurpation. This is alienation. When this happens men have to turn elsewhere to define what is centrally important to them. Sometimes they turn to another society, for instance a smaller, more intense religious community. But another possibility, which had great historical importance in Hegel's eyes, is that they strike out on their own and define their identity as individuals. Individualism comes, as Hegel puts it in the *VG*, when men cease to identify with the community's life, when they 'reflect', that is, turn back on themselves, and see themselves most importantly as individuals with individual goals. This is the moment of dissolution of a *Volk* and its life.

What happens here is that the individual ceases to define his identity principally by the public experience of the society. On the contrary, the most meaningful experience, which seems to him most vital, to touch most the core of his being, is private. Public experience seems to him secondary, narrow and parochial, merely touching a part of himself. Should that experience try to make good its claim to centrality as before, the individual enters into conflict with it and has to fight it.

This kind of shift has of course been instantiated many times in history, but the paradigm event of this kind for Hegel occurs with

the breakup of the Greek city state. Thus in the Greek *polis* men identified themselves with its public life and its common experiences. Their most basic, unchallengeable values were those embodied in this public life, and hence their major duty and virtue was to continue and sustain this life. In other words, they lived fully by their *Sittlichkeit*. But the public life of each of these *poleis* was narrow and parochial. It was not in conformity with universal reason. With Socrates arises the challenge of a man who cannot agree to base his life on the parochial, on the merely given, but requires a foundation in universal reason. Socrates himself expresses a deep contradiction since he accepts the idea of *Sittlichkeit*, of laws that one should hold allegiance to; he derives this from universal reason as well. And yet because of his allegiance to reason he cannot live with the actual laws of Athens. Rather he undermines them; he persuades the youth not to take them as final, but to question them. He has to be put to death, a death which he accepts because of his allegiance to the laws.

But now a new type of man arises who cannot identify with this public life. He begins to relate principally not to the public life but to his own grasp of universal reason. The norms that he now feels compelling are quite unsubstantiated in any reality; they are ideas that go beyond the real. The reflecting individual is in the domain of *Moralität*.

Of course, even the self-conscious individual related to some society. Men thought of themselves *qua* moral beings as belonging to some community, the city of men and Gods of the Stoics, the city of God of the Christian. But they saw this city as quite other than and beyond the earthly city. And the actual community of philosophers or believers in which they worked out and sustained the language by which they identified themselves was scattered and powerless. The common life on which their identity as rational or God-fearing individuals was founded was or could be very attenuated. So that what was most important in a man's life was what he did or thought as an individual, not his participation in the public life of a real historical community.

In any case, the community of the wise, as that of the saints, was without external, self-subsistent existence in history. Rather the public realm was given over to private, unjustified power. This is Hegel's usual description of the ancient period of universal empires which succeeded the city state, particularly the Roman empire. The unity and fulfilment of *Sittlichkeit*, lost from this world, was transposed out of it into an ethereal beyond.

What then is Hegel saying with his thesis of the primacy of *Sittlichkeit*, and the related notion of the community as 'ethical substance', a spiritual life in which man must take part? We can express it in three propositions, put in ascending order of contestability. First, that what is most important for man can only be attained in relation to the public life of a community, not in the private self-definition of the alienated individual. Secondly, this community must not be a merely partial one, for example a conventicle or private association, whose life is conditioned, controlled and limited by a larger society. It must be coterminous with the minimum self-sufficient human reality, the state. The public life which expresses at least some of our important norms must be that of a state.

Thirdly, the public life of the state has this crucial importance for men because the norms and ideas it expresses are not just human inventions. On the contrary, the state expresses the Idea, the ontological structure of things. In the final analysis, it is of vital importance because it is one of the indispensable ways in which man recovers his essential relation to this ontological structure, the other being in the modes of consciousness which Hegel calls 'absolute spirit', and this real relation through the life of the community is essential to the completion of the return to conscious identity between man and the Absolute (which means also the Absolute's self-identity).

Obviously these three propositions are linked. The third gives the underlying ground of the first and second. If man achieves his true identity as a vehicle of cosmic spirit, and if one of the indispensable media in which this identity is expressed is the public life of his political society, then evidently it is essential that he come to identify himself in relation to this public life. He must transcend the alienation of a private or sectarian identity, since these can never link him fully to the Absolute.

There is a complex of ideas which lies behind the Hegelian use of terms like 'substance', 'essence', *Endzweck*, *Selbstzweck* in speaking of the community. First of all, the set of practices and institutions which make up the public life of the community express the most important norms, most central to its members' identity, so that they are only sustained in their identity by their participation in these practices and institutions, which in their turn they perpetuate by this participation. Secondly, the community concerned is the state, that is, a really self-sufficient community. And thirdly, this community has this central role because it expresses the Idea,

the formula of rational necessity underlying man and his world.

Thus what is strange and contestable in Hegel's theory of the state is not the idea of a larger life in which men are immersed, or the notion that the public life of a society expresses certain ideas, which are thus in a sense the ideas of the society as a whole and not just of the individuals, so that we can speak of a people as having a certain 'spirit'. For throughout most of human history men have lived most intensely in relation to the meanings expressed in the public life of their societies. Only an exaggerated atomism could make the condition of alienated men seem the inescapable human norm.

But where Hegel does make a substantial claim which is not easy to grant is in his basic ontological view, that man is the vehicle of cosmic spirit, and the corollary, that the state expresses the underlying formula of necessity by which this spirit posits the world.

In other words, the idea of a *Volksgeist* is intelligible enough: the spirit of a people whose ideas are expressed in their common institutions, by which they define their identity. And something like it is essential if we are to understand what has gone on in human history. What is harder to credit is the thesis that men – and hence in their own way these *Volksgeister* – are vehicles of a cosmic spirit which is returning to self-consciousness through man.

Thus there is no specially odd Hegelian doctrine of a super-individual subject of society, as is often believed. There is only a very difficult doctrine of a cosmic subject whose vehicle is man. This is woven into a theory of man in society which by itself is far from implausible or bizarre. Indeed, it is much superior to the atomistic conceptions of some of Hegel's liberal opponents.

Thus the state which is fully rational will be one which expresses in its institutions and practices the most important ideas and norms which its citizens recognize, and by which they define their identity. And this will be the case because the state expresses the articulations of the Idea, which rational man comes to see as the formula of necessity underlying all things, which is destined to come to self-consciousness in man. So that the rational state will restore *Sittlichkeit*, the embodiment of the highest norms in an ongoing public life. It will recover what was lost with the Greeks, but on a higher level. For the fully developed state will incorporate the principle of the individual rational will judging by universal criteria, the very principle that undermined and eventually destroyed the Greek *polis*.

This integration of individuality and *Sittlichkeit* is a requirement

we can deduce from the Idea. But this is also Hegel's way of formulating and answering the yearning of his age to unite somehow the radical moral autonomy of Kant and the expressive unity of the Greek *polis*. Hegel's answer to this conundrum was, as we saw, an extraordinary and original combination of the ultra-modern aspiration to autonomy, and a renewed vision of cosmic order as the foundation of society; a derivation, we might say, of cosmic order from the idea of radical autonomy itself, via a displacement of its centre of gravity from man to *Geist*. This synthesis he saw as the goal of history. Let us turn now to see how it develops in history.

4. THE GOALS OF HISTORY

The fulfilment of Spirit therefore requires the growth of a community which will fully express and embody reason. And since Spirit posits the world of space and time in order to realize itself, this fulfilment and hence also the community of reason can be considered the goal of history. This is how Hegel speaks of it in *Reason in History*:

> The goal is that it come to be known that [Spirit] presses forward only to know itself as it is in and for itself, that it brings itself in its truth to appearance before itself – the goal is that it bring a spiritual world to existence which is adequate to its own [sc. the world's] concept, that it realize and perfect its truth, that religion and the state be so produced by it that it becomes adequate to its concept . . . (*VG*, 61)

In this passage, both sides of the goal of Spirit in history are expressed: Spirit is trying to come to an understanding, a knowledge of self. But in order to do this it must bring into existence a reality, a spiritual community which must also be a real community (the *geistige Welt* must be embodied in a *Staat*) which is adequate to its concept. Or again: 'the goal is this, that Spirit come to consciousness of itself or make the world congruent to itself [*die Welt sich gemäss mache*] – for these come to the same thing . . .' (*VG*, 74). Thus history is to be understood teleologically, as directed in order to realize *Geist*. What happens in history has sense, justification – indeed, the highest justification. It is good, the plan of God.

> The true good, the universal divine reason, is also the power to bring itself about. This good, this reason in its most concrete representation is God . . . The insight of philosophy is that no force prevails over the power of the good, of God, which would prevent it achieving its end [*sich geltend zu machen*] . . . that world history exhibits nothing other than the plan of providence. God rules the world. (*VG*, 77)

History is according to providence, and the true philosophy of history, as Hegel says, is a theodicy.

History thus reaches its culmination in a community which is in conformity with reason; or we could also say, one which embodies freedom, for 'the final purpose of the world is Spirit's consciousness of his freedom and hence the first full realization of this freedom' (*VG*, 63).

This freedom is not, of course, individual, negative freedom, the freedom to do what I like. It is the freedom that man has in following his own essence, reason. On the other hand, 'the arbitrary choice [*das Belieben*] of the individual is precisely not freedom. Freedom which is limited is caprice [*Willkür*] which relates to the particular element of needs' (*VG*, 111). But to follow reason is to participate in the larger life of the state, for 'In the state alone has man rational existence' (loc. cit.). But the fully rational state is not the first community with which men identify as their 'substance'. On the contrary, all important historical developments take place in such communities. Those men who live outside a state, in patriarchal tribal societies for instance, are totally on the margins of history, either before it really starts or at its fringes. What comes at the end of history is not community as such, but rather one which for the first time is fully adequate to the Concept, to freedom and reason.

Hence the march of history can be seen as the succession of such communities, the earlier ones being very imperfect expressions of what the later ones will embody more and more adequately. Hegel calls these concrete historical communities or peoples which are (more or less adequate) embodiments of Spirit, *Volksgeister*. They are the subjects of history. 'The Spirit we have to do with here is the *Volksgeist*' (*VG*, 59).[1]

Thus the Idea is realized in history, but through stages, and these stages are historical civilizations, *Volksgeister*.

> World history is the presentation of the divine, absolute process of Spirit in its highest forms, of this progress through stages whereby he attains to his truth and self-consciousness about himself. The forms of these stages are the world-historical *Volksgeister*, the character of their ethical life, their constitution, their art, religion, science. To bring each of these stages to realization, this is the infinite drive [*Trieb*] of the world spirit, his irresistible thrust [*Drang*,] for this articulation and its realization is his concept. (*VG*, 75)

[1] Let me repeat that this notion of *Volksgeist* does not involve some special doctrine about a supra-individual subject of society. *Volksgeister* are historical cultures, but seen as embodiments of *Geist*, at a certain stage of its realization and self-knowledge. The basic difficulty, if there is one, concerns the relation of man to this cosmic subject of which they are the vehicles. There is no special problem about the historical configurations men adopt to embody Spirit.

The last sentence points to the fact that this set of stages is itself necessary, according to the Concept. It is necessary to its self-realization that Spirit move from the greatest outwardness to full self-consciousness. But in the same way the stages on the road are set by necessity; each must work itself out. The motor force of movement is contradiction, that between the external reality and what it is meant to realize. The contradiction eventually brings any given form to dissolution. But the particular nature of the contradiction in this form determines the outcome, and hence from the collapse of the first form another specific one arises. Having resolved the contradiction of its predecessor, it falls victim to its own, and so on through the whole of history.

In this way history shows a dialectical movement, of the kind we described above in chapter 1. But since the beginning point and the goal are set by the Idea, hence by necessity, so are all the intermediate stages necessary. For granted the starting point and the goal, the particular nature of the contradiction in the first form necessarily follows; and from its resolution arises the second form, from which the goal and the nature of the second contradiction must follow; and so on. History should thus follow a necessary dialectical plan.

The plan of history is that of the Idea, the philosophical understanding of which is presupposed by the philosophy of history. Hence the dialectic of history is to be understood as reflecting the conceptually necessary stages in the self-unfolding of the Idea.

But not surprisingly there is in fact a looseness of fit between history and logic. The conceptual relations in their general form permit of too many combinations to form a very rigorous *a priori* framework; and the historical events permit of too many interpretations in such high-level concepts as 'universal', 'particular', 'individual' not to allow a great deal of play. One feels that the system would allow of accommodation to very wide changes in the course of history if we were suddenly to discover that our knowledge of the past had been mistaken.

In spite of this, however, there is a very strong and even potentially convincing unity to the general plan of things. The higher one soars over the detail, the more persuasive the philosophy of history seems. Even though there are very often fascinating insights in Hegel's detail, it is the fit of the detail with the whole which raises doubts.

Stages of history, as the last quotation above says, are represented by *Volksgeister*. Each stage is embodied in a certain people which labours to bring forth the Idea of that particular stage. This is the common purpose of the people; they remain entirely captured by

this common task, entirely identified with it, until it is achieved. Then things fall apart. Its members cease to give themselves totally, they turn to reflection, to an identity as individuals outside the public goal. They fall into 'political nullity' (*VG*, 68).

Hegel talks in this passage as though the transition from one stage to the next came about through the fruition and natural death of each world-historical people, rather than through an inner contradiction. But this is not really an incompatible view. Having developed its particular form to the utmost a given *Volksgeist* has also brought its inadequacy to a head. There being no further development of the Idea, only the inadequacy now stands out. Hence it is inevitable that men desert this state and dream of something else – desert it in their fundamental allegiance, that is, for they may go on living happily in it for some time. Somewhere else, however, a new force arises which bears the next stage.

But what men are doing in history, they do not fully grasp. Why they desert one standard and go to another is not clear to them. Or rather, they may have some clear idea, but this is not the deepest truth, since of necessity men in earlier stages of history cannot understand the plan of *Geist* as the philosopher now can (Hegel now can). This is where Hegel introduces his famous idea of the cunning of reason. Reason is represented in this image as 'using the passions of men to fulfil her own purposes'. Particular men and their purposes fall in the battle, but the universal purpose carries on safe above it.

> It is not the universal idea which places itself in opposition and struggle, or puts itself in danger; it holds itself safe from attack and uninjured in the background and sends the particular of passion into the struggle to be worn down. We can call it the *cunning of reason* that the Idea makes passions work for it, in such a way that whereby it posits itself in existence it loses thereby and suffers injury. (*VG*, 105)[1]

But this picturesque image is not meant to be taken *au pied de la lettre*, as though a super-individual subject was deploying tools to its own ends. Rather we have to take into account that even men at the earliest stages of history are the vehicles of *Geist*. They have some sense, however cloudy, however fantastically expressed, of the demands of Spirit. Hence it is not just a question of men's individual ambition being used for a foreign purpose. Rather it is that those men whose individual ambition coincides with the interests of Spirit are filled with a sense of mission. They instinctively sense the importance of what they are doing, and so do the men around them, who flock to their banner; even though both the great man and his

[1] Cf. passage in the *Logic*, in the section on Inner Teleology (*WL*, II, 397–8).

followers would be incapable of articulating the significance of what they are doing or of articulating it correctly. Hegel uses the word 'instinct' for this unconscious recognition of significance.

Thus in the passage quoted above about the cunning of reason, Hegel cites the case of Caesar who in fact falls under the assassins' knives as soon as he has done the work of Spirit in bringing the Republic to an end. This is an example of reason using expendable instruments. But in an earlier passage (*VG*, 89–90), he says in connection with Caesar that the correspondence of his own goal with that of the world-spirit (*Weltgeist*) was what gave him strength: 'his work was an instinct which brought to fruition what the time called for in and for itself'. And Hegel goes on:

> These are the great men in history, whose own particular purposes comprehend the substantial content which is the will of the world-spirit. This content is the true source of their power; it is in the universal unconscious instinct of men. They are inwardly driven to it, and have no further support against him who has taken up the fulfilment of this goal as his interest, so that they could resist him. Rather the peoples assemble under his banner; he shows them what their own inner bent [*immanenter Trieb*] is and carries it out.

Thus the work of the *Weltgeist* is felt as an *immanenter Trieb* among men, one that is merely 'instinctual', that is, not understood: and this is why the work of reason gets done among the clash of individual ambitions in history.

Thus the greatness of world-historical individuals does not just lie in their being instruments of the world-spirit. They are also those who first sense and give articulation to what must be the next stage. Once they raise this banner men follow. In a time when one form is played out, when Spirit has deserted the reigning form, it is the world-historical individual who shows the way to what all men in their depths aspire to. 'It is the world-historical individuals who first told men what they wanted' (*VG*, 99).

Once they do articulate this new form it has an irresistible force, even for those who are inclined by their own interest or judgement against it, because deep down they cannot help identifying with it.

> For the Spirit which has stepped on to the next stage is the soul of all individuals, but an unconscious inner sense which great men first bring to consciousness for them. It is nevertheless what they really want, and it thus exercises a force on them which they surrender to even against their own conscious will; thus they follow these leaders of souls, for they feel the irresistible force of their own inner spirit which confronts them. (loc. cit.)

A category like the 'cunning of reason', far from being another incomprehensible, 'mystical' Hegelian idea, is indispensable for any theory of history which wants to give a role to unconscious motivation.[1]

5. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Let us turn now to Hegel's philosophy of history. The principal drama of the sweep of history is the one which builds towards the major crux of Hegel's philosophy of politics; how to reconcile the freedom of the individual who knows himself as universal rationality with a restored *Sittlichkeit*. The main drama of history is then opened by the breakdown of the perfect unity of *Sittlichkeit* in the Greek world, the birth of the individual with universal consciousness. It then follows the slow development through the succeeding centuries both of the individual (his *Bildung*) and of the institutions embodying *Sittlichkeit*, so that the two can eventually rendezvous in the rational state.

There isn't space here to go into the detail of this development. But what is indispensable for our purposes is to take up Hegel's reading of the climactic event of his youth, the French Revolution. This was the event against which his generation had to think out their political philosophy, and rethink their stance to the Enlightenment. It is thus not surprising that Hegel's conception of the modern predicament emerges so strongly in his reading of these events.

For Hegel, the disaster of the Jacobin Terror, the excesses of the Revolution as it went off the rails, are to be understood from the root inadequacy of the Enlightenment. The development of modern man is a continuation of the rational individual, the subject of *Moralität*, who broke free from the narrow compass of the ancient *polis*. But what is added in the modern period is the certainty that rationality rules the world, that thought can rediscover itself in being. This confidence, which comes ultimately from Christianity as the religion of the Incarnation, has been developing throughout

[1] Shlomo Avineri (*Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (C.U.P., 1972), 233) finds that Hegel contradicts himself in his doctrine of the world-historical individual, since he seems to hold sometimes that he is fully conscious of the idea he is realizing, at other times only instinctively conscious, and in still other passages he is said not to be conscious at all. Avineri's quotes are from *Reason in History*, and it seems to me that with a little allowance for the unpolished nature of this text which Hegel never prepared for publication, the texts can fairly easily be reconciled around the notion that world-historical individuals have a sense of the higher truth they serve, but they see it through a glass darkly.

the centuries since Christ, but reaches a qualitatively new stage, a stage of conscious self-affirmation with the modern period.

This development reaches its culmination in the Enlightenment, and in its belief in the almost unlimited capacity of human reason to remake the conditions of man's life so as to assure him happiness and fulfilment. But this vision of things suffers from a fatal flaw. It is right to see the unity of reason and being, but quite wrong to attribute this unity simply to *human* reason. In reality, as we know, Hegel holds that everything which is issues from the reason of a cosmic subjectivity. The confidence of the Enlightenment, emerging out of an earlier stage of alienation in which the world was seen as a vale of tears, foreign to God and reason, is certainly an important step forward. But it remains crucially inadequate in that it identifies the sovereign reason as being that of man, rather than *Geist*.

This has as fateful consequence that reason remains purely formal, that it is incapable of generating a content. We saw this connection between the man-centredness and the vacuity of reason in the discussion of Kant's moral theory in 2.2 above. Man sets out to remake the world according to reason, but he is incapable of giving a content to this impetus, of establishing any particular plan as one truly dictated by reason.

Now the point that reason alone cannot provide a criterion for action may be generally accepted when it is made against Kant's moral theory. But why should the same point be valid against the utilitarian social engineering of the Enlightenment, which takes its starting point in what people desire, and promises to produce happiness? Surely this kind of programme generates a definite content.

But Hegel wants to claim that utilitarianism is no more capable than the Kantian formal principles of reason of developing a rational plan of social action. Hegel makes the point that the principle of utility assesses the value of things extrinsically, by how they serve the ends of man. This seems eminently rational.

But where should this process stop? With the *de facto* desires of man? But why should we stop here? Men with their desires are themselves external facts in the world; why should not they too be evaluated extrinsically in the interest of 'society', or the future? We are in danger of falling into a senseless regress, what Hegel calls a 'bad infinite'. The point of this criticism is not just to lay bare a problem for the justification of utilitarian ethics, but to identify a real tendency in the system. Utilitarian thought can step over the brink in which man becomes means and not end, as for instance

with reforms like the English Poor Law of 1834, which put the unemployed into workhouses for the sake of general utility. For it lacks a notion of intrinsic good.

And it is the more easy to step over this brink in that the criterion of *de facto* desire cannot work in practice. For desires are too varied and contradictory, between and within people. Moral conflict breaks out between desires, and some criterion of intrinsic goodness, of what makes a desire good, has to be found.

In addition, in order to make our desires real in the world of history, we have to achieve common goals. For the only self-subsistent reality is a community, and any shaping of things which will be self-subsistent must be the shaping of a whole community. There must be a common aspiration.

Now this fact seems to provide the answer which we were looking for above, a criterion for judging between desires. Those desires are to be followed which are truly general, which are for the good of all, and not just for oneself. We have the basis here for the idea of the general will. This is the other great discovery of Enlightenment ethical theory. Man shapes his society according to right reason by founding it fully on the general will. For the rational is the universal, that which holds for all men and is binding on all men.

The step from utilitarianism to general will theory is an attempt, as we saw in section 2, to achieve a more integral realization of reason. The ethic of utility has to take an arbitrary final point in *de facto* human desire, something which is just given. The ethic of the general will promises to go beyond what is just given, what men happen to want, to ends derived from the rational will itself.

This is in any case how Hegel sees the step by Rousseau and later developed by Kant. But this new theory is as incapable as its predecessor of developing a content, a set of substantive goals out of the idea of reason, because as we saw it remains centred on the free, rational will of man. It remains like utilitarianism in the domain of 'understanding' (*Verstand*) which separates finite from infinite, and cannot see that finite spirits are linked into the larger reality of *Geist*.

The ethic of the general will, of formal universality, remained empty. But it is one thing to weave empty ethical theories in one's study; it is another thing to try to put this empty general will into reality in history. The Germans only did the first; but the French tried the second, and the terrible, destructive consequences revealed what was implicit in this emptiness and showed the need to go

beyond to another stage. This traumatic, climactic event was the French Revolution (cf. *PR*, §258).

Hegel thus sees the French Revolution as the culminating attempt to realize the dictates of human reason in the world. We who have seen more horrendous, far-reaching attempts have to recall what an unprecedented and world-shaking event the Revolution was. Hegel saw it as an attempt to remake society entirely according to the prescriptions of human reason, without any reliance on authority or on the shape of things evolved by tradition. Men are to remake things in an unrestricted, unconditioned freedom, what Hegel calls 'absolute freedom'.

This aspiration wreaks terrible destruction. And the root cause of the destructiveness is its vacuity. The Revolution, Hegel argues in the famous passage of the *PhG* (ch. VI. B. III, pp. 413–22), is incapable of recreating a new society to replace the one it has destroyed. For a viable new political society requires differentiation of function. And this has to be embodied in political structures, such as different political institutions, executive, legislative and judiciary; and also Hegel believes in differentiated social structures (the *Stände*, or estates). But no particular differentiated structure can be tolerated, for it would stand as a restriction on the supposedly unconditioned freedom of rational will to remake the world according to its dictates. And no ground can be found in reason (that is, purely *human* reason) to justify any such particular structure. The differentiated structure of society can in the end only be justified in Hegel's eyes, as we saw above, by its standing as an expression of *cosmic* reason.

The drive to absolute freedom is therefore incapable of rebuilding; it can only destroy an *ancien régime*, not construct a new one. It is in fact fixed permanently in its negative, destructive phase. Consequently, once the *ancien régime* has been entirely laid waste, it must turn its destructive energies elsewhere. As a 'fury of destruction', it begins to devour its own children. This is Hegel's derivation of the Terror.

But, as we can readily see, this diagnosis of the vacuity and hence destructiveness of the drive to absolute freedom depends on a crucial premiss, that all societies require differentiation. Now this is far from being an uncontroversial premiss. On the contrary, it is precisely the aim of the revolutionary impetus which has come down to us from the French Revolution to create full equality, and to this end to sweep away all the differentiations of role and privilege which have always bedevilled human society. It is not a very

convincing refutation of this aspiration just to assert that it won't work, that differentiation is ineradicable. Why shouldn't, after all, a real society of equals be able to exercise sovereignty in an ongoing way without being tied to complex mediating structures? Why shouldn't it one day be possible that the society adumbrated in May 1968 should come to pass?

We began to touch on Hegel's reasons for holding this premiss in chapter 2.4, where we saw that the articulations of the Concept must be matched in the state. But in examining more closely why this articulation must be and why the aspiration to absolute freedom cannot provide it, we shall get to the heart of Hegel's theory of the modern state.

The society of absolute freedom must be entirely the creation of its members. First, it must be such that everything in it is the fruit of human will and decision. And secondly, the decisions must be taken with the real participation of all.[1] This condition, which we can call universal and total participation, is one in which all have a say in the whole decision.

This contrasts with an arrangement whereby a group may distribute functions, so that one sub-group has the responsibility for determining one aspect of things, another the responsibility for another, and so on. We can say of this group, too, that the total outcome is determined by the will of the members; but it is not true of the individual members, perhaps of any individual members, that they took a decision concerning the total outcome, or had a voice in such a decision in the sense of voting on the total outcome along with others.

Thus an ideal free-enterprise economy in which all men are independent entrepreneurs is one in which the outcome is determined by the decisions of members, but where no one has taken a decision or participated in a decision about the total outcome. Alternatively a traditional society may have a structure with differentiated roles which is considered to be outside the realm of decision. This structure in turn will determine how and by whom those matters are decided which remain within the realm of decision. In all likelihood this structure will relate different people differently to the decisions to be taken; so that some will fall to the chief, say, others to the elders, others to the medicine man, some to the women,

[1] 'Die Welt ist (dem Selbstbewußtsein) schlechtin sein Wille, und dieser ist allgemeiner Wille. Und zwar ist er nicht der leere Gedanke des Willens, der in stillschweigende oder repräsentierte Einwilligung gesetzt wird, sondern reell allgemeiner Wille, Wille aller Einzelnen als solcher' (*PhG*, 415).

and others again will be the responsibility of the whole people. Perhaps, too, even when the whole people decide, the manner of the decision will be determined by the structure – they may vote to accept or refuse proposals framed by the elders.

The society which aims at absolute freedom must be unlike both the free-enterprise and the traditional-society models briefly adumbrated. Unlike the latter, it cannot allow for structures which are beyond the reach of decision, which are supposedly rooted in the nature of things, the will of the Gods, time-hallowed law and so on. It is the nature of the Enlightenment, as Hegel saw, not to accept any such authority. Everything must be thought out from the ground up by human reason and decided according to reason by human will. To use a term which Hegel employs in one of his early theological writings, the rational will cannot accept the merely 'positive', institutions and structures which are simply there, simply in being, without being rationally justified, shown to be necessary or desirable by reason. Hence it is that the state founded on the general will contains no structures which are not themselves the result of decision, save simply those which are essentially part of the process of decision itself which yields the general will: that deliberation be in general assembly, by free discussion, without factions etc. But all else, the form of the government, who is to fill the roles of government, the rights of property, all these are decided. There are not even entrenched individual rights, matters taken outside the sphere of government, as there are with Locke.

Absolute freedom thus rejects structures which are not founded on will, the fruit of decision. But at the same time it rejects the other model, which is instantiated for instance in the free-enterprise economy. This, too, be it noted, has broken with the traditional society. It is a child of the Enlightenment. It need have no 'positive' institutions, save the institutions of property and those which go along with its exchange and alienation (contract, buying, selling etc.), in other words institutions which are essential to the type of decisions which it makes central, decisions of individual entrepreneurs concerning the disposal of their property. No structure founded on the authority of tradition, the divine order of things, is to be respected or obeyed. Only those are taken as fundamental which are essential to the exercise of rational human will. In this way, the free-enterprise society is similar to the society of absolute freedom. Where they differ profoundly is in their conception of the exercise of rational will. In one case this is expressed in the decisions of individuals about their good, in the other rather in decisions of

the whole society about their common affairs. One is the realm of the particular, the other of the general will. The root structures of each are meant to make possible the respective paradigm decisions of each. But the general-will model cannot accept the model of free enterprise, for even though this latter rejects the 'positive', it remains true that the total outcome is not the fruit of will and decision. Each man decides for himself, and hence the outcome in so far as it results from this decision is his own. But he has only a relatively minor effect on the whole outcome. For the rest he is faced by conditions which he did not make, which are the fruit of hundreds of other wills, each of whom is in a similar predicament. The way these wills concatenate is a function of blind natural law, not will. But if the point of freedom is that what I live should be decided by myself, then to the extent that I live in conditions which are only partly the fruit of my decision, to that extent I am not integrally free.

Complete freedom would require that the whole outcome be decided by me. But of course, since the whole outcome is a social one, it cannot be decided by me alone. Or rather, if I decide it alone, then no one else who lives under this outcome is free. If we are all to be free, we must all take the decision. But this means that we must all take the whole decision, we must all participate in a decision about the nature of the total outcome. There must be universal and total participation. Participation must be not only universal, that is, involving everybody, but in this sense total, that all have a say in the whole decision. Of course, even this is not enough. If there are irreconcilable differences of view, so that some of us are voted down and forced to knuckle under, then we will be unfree, coerced. The theory of absolute freedom thus requires some notion of the unanimity of our real will; and this is what we have in the theory of the general will.

The aspiration to universal and total participation seems to be implicit in the formula in Rousseau's *Contrat Social*, where the aim is to find a form of association which man can enter, and yet in obeying only himself remain as free as before. The notion of 'obeying only oneself' requires that the laws under which one lives should result totally from one's decision. The only way to reconcile this with life in society is by the universal and total participation which is the formula of the general will.

But then it is clear that the aspiration to absolute freedom cannot consort with any articulated differentiation of the society. The only structures which can be accepted as untouchable are those which

underlie the taking of decisions. But these have to be totally taken by all. Thus these structures have to be based on and ensure the maximum homogeneity of citizens. For if all are to take the total decision, then in this crucial respect all are to be seen as identical. Moreover among those institutions which are created by the society none can be allowed which would negate this fundamental likeness and equality of all in taking the decisions. For instance, if it turns out to be necessary to this end that property be equalized (Rousseau thought so), then this will have to be done. No differentiations can be allowed which entail different relations to the process of decision, not even those which would have this as indirect result, such as inequality in property. The society must be a homogeneous one. Under the sovereignty of the general will, differences are of course allowed and necessary. Some men must fulfil the roles of government. But this is seen on Rousseau's scheme as simply carrying out the decisions made by the whole, the putting into practice of the general will. And this role differentiation must on no account reflect back on the process whereby legislation is passed.

The demands of absolute freedom therefore rule out any differentiation of the society into estates, different social groups identified by their ways of living and making a living, who would be differently related to the government of the society. And they also rule out any differentiation of the political system along the lines of the division of powers. For here, too, different groups take decisions affecting only part of the outcome. Indeed, the presupposition of a division of powers which can be meaningful as a system of checks and balances is that each of the powers be exercised by different people, hence not more than one by the whole, and the others by less than the whole. But no decisions of significance can be taken by less than the whole if we are to keep to the exigencies of absolute freedom. We can allow for the delegation of purely executive decision, but not for any which affects the design of our society, or the laws we live under. The general-will theory cannot admit of representative institutions, as we see with Rousseau.

Hence the aspiration of absolute freedom contradicts Hegel's notion of what is necessary for a rational state in ruling out differentiation. I have said above that we can find warrant for this belief in differentiation in Hegel's ontology. But this deeper ontological ground meshed with insights Hegel gleaned from the history of his time as he saw it. Hegel forcefully made the point that the ancient *polis* could not be a model for the modern state. Direct democracy was possible then because societies were small, because they were

homogeneous by virtue of relegating many functions to slaves and metics, and because the individualism of modern times had not yet developed. All these changes in the modern world which mark it off from the *polis* make differentiation unavoidable in Hegel's view. And in some of this reasoning Hegel is far from alone in contemporary thought and judgement.

It is now a commonplace that the size of the modern state makes it impossible for all to rule together under a system of universal and total participation. There must be representation. So that the contemporary protagonists of total participation – and they are perhaps more numerous today than ever before – follow Rousseau in opting for a radical decentralization of power as the only solution.

But although the size of the modern state may make some differentiation of political roles unavoidable, it does not show that there must be social differentiation and that this must have relevance for the process of decision. But this is the force of the Hegelian notion of estates (*Stände*) into which society is articulated. For these have not only each a distinct economic base and mode of life, but are also related each in its own way to the process of government.

Hegel's account of the different estates differs slightly between his works in the early 1800s and the mature version of the *PR*, but basically he singles out the following groups: (1) the peasantry, (2) the land-owning classes, (3) the business class and (4) the class of professionals and functionaries which could staff the administration of the modern state. He also observed the beginnings of (5) a proletariat, with misgivings, one might even say dismay. He saw this more as a catastrophe to be avoided than as a new group which had to find its own characteristic way of integrating into the state.

In order to understand Hegel's views, we have to remember that these social groups were much more sharply marked off from each other than the classes of contemporary society. Then the peasants on the land, the urban bourgeoisie, and in some countries the landed aristrocracy, were indeed strikingly different in outlook, style of life, interest in politics, conception of political life and so on. The development of modern society, partly under the impulse of general-will theory and Enlightenment modes of thought generally, has been towards a greater and greater homogenization, and in this respect a modern Western society would be unrecognizable to a man of early-nineteenth-century Europe (though America at that time already gave a foretaste of what was coming, as de Tocqueville saw).

But faced with the differences he witnessed in his day, Hegel

reasoned that the idea of universal and total participation was chimaerical. The modern state, as against the ancient *polis*, aims at universal citizenship. This means that all economic functions will be exercised by citizens. But visibly, Hegel thought, these different tasks go along with very different outlooks, modes of life, values and life styles. So that, first of all, these different estates would have to have an important life of their own which would not be under the jurisdiction of the state as a whole. (This only really had application for the land-owning and bourgeois classes; Hegel did not consider the peasants capable of self-government, nor the proletariat; but in this he was far from exceptional in the Europe of his day where these classes were almost universally without the franchise.) And secondly, because of this, they would require a different relation to the business of government. Both these requirements involve a breach in the principle of universal and total participation.

In this predicament of real-life differentiation, it was chimaerical to seek to place everyone on the same footing at the centre of the total decision-making. The groups would naturally want in some areas to take partial decisions on their own. And for the rest, their way of relating to and identifying with the whole would be profoundly different. The peasant class for instance was in Hegel's view steeped in an unreflective adherence to the *Sitten* of the nation; their basic reaction to their natural leaders was one of trust (*Vertrauen*). They did not require to be at the centre of decision in order to identify with the result, to sense it as their own.

In a different way the burghers, given over largely to the pursuit of their private gain, production and exchange, have on the whole neither time nor inclination to give themselves over totally to the *res publica*. They are more happily and appropriately related to the process of government by representatives. The class of landowners is, on the other hand, one whose whole life is meant to be given in service. There is no question of their being related at second hand to public affairs.

In talking of the burghers we touch on the third reason Hegel gave differentiating our predicament from that of the ancient *polis*. We have developed a consciousness of the individual which had no place in the ancient *polis*, which indeed brought about its demise. This consciousness of the individual as simply a man, and as significant for that reason – neither as Athenian nor Spartan, German nor French, Jew nor Gentile – is what is expressed in what Hegel calls 'civil society' which we can roughly think of as the bourgeois economy. Modern man has an extra dimension of complexity as

compared to the ancients. He is not simply a citizen of his country; he also thinks of himself as a man *tout court*, and this is a significant part of his identity since man as such is a bearer of universal reason.

It follows that not all men can give themselves totally to the public life. For some of the energy of most men will be engaged by the private. But since the state can only be if some men identify totally with it and make its life their life, there must be a political division of labour. Hence once more universal and total participation is impossible. The class which most gives itself to the private is the bourgeois class; hence they are happy to be represented by some of their number in the direction of affairs. But there is another group, which in the earlier Jena variants of Hegel's theory is the aristocracy, and which later is the bureaucracy or universal class, which gives itself totally to the affairs of the state.

We might think of coping with this third difficulty by breeding a society of all-round men who could at once each have a full range of private occupations and also all participate fully in the life of the state. But Hegel rejects this possibility for two reasons. First, his theory of man's individual career is that we only achieve something significant by giving ourselves fully to it, and that means renouncing other things.[1] Those who pine after everything achieve nothing. The fully realized is the particularized. Hegel's ontology and worldly wisdom come together here.

But behind this notion of necessary specialization in society there are also the requirements of the Idea. These were that the different facets of the Concept find embodiment in the state. But the fullest embodiment of an articulated whole is when its varied facets are realized in different parts or organs. To be mingled in undifferentiated form is a more primitive stage. Thus the fully developed state is one in which the different moments of the Concept – immediate unity, separation and mediated unity – are realized in separate groups, each with the appropriate mode of life. This is the dialectical derivation of the estates of modern society from the Concept, which Hegel sets out in the *PR*.

Thus Hegel's understanding of the inescapable diversity of modern society converges with his ontological vision. They lead him to the conclusion that the real differentiation of economic, social and political roles which is unavoidable in a society which does not shunt menial functions off on to non-citizens brings with it inescapable differences of culture, values and modes of life. These in turn demand a certain measure of autonomous life within each

[1] Cf. *PhG* and *PR*, §207.

estate, and even more they make the way that each estate can and wants to relate to the whole different. This is why the aspiration to absolute freedom is misplaced and vain, and this for reasons which are much more fundamental than those which relate to the size of the modern state, serious as these are.

6. THE MODERN DILEMMA

This might perhaps be a good place to interrupt the exposition of Hegel's philosophy of history and politics and turn to the question of its relevance for today. For it must appear from what has just been said that the question is irrevocably decided in the negative. Not only is Hegel's view of the polity based on the ontology of Spirit to which it is difficult to give credence, but on top of this it appears to have very reactionary consequences, rejecting altogether the modern thrust towards equality and radical democracy. Of what possible interest could such a theory be to us? Have not the developments of the modern polity made it quite dated, as well as being mildly repellent?

Of course his first argument about the size of a modern polity is well taken. And he is also right that modern man has a private dimension which makes it difficult if not unlikely that men can ever again all give themselves so thoroughly to the public life of their society as in earlier ages. But on social differentiation he has surely just been proved wrong. The great homogenization of modern society shows that however varied may be the functions performed by citizens they can develop to a unity of outlook and life style which puts paid to any argument for different relations to the process of decision. The increasing 'classlessness' of modern society seems to point in this direction. Of course Hegel was more realistic in his day than those who believed in what was then an 'abstract' equality. But they turn out to be more far-seeing in that they foretold the homogeneity which a society founded on this doctrine could bring about.

But if we abstract from the particular application of Hegel's theory to the estates of his day, there is an important issue which is far from being decided today. What kind of differentiation can modern society admit of? There is a dilemma here which we have yet to resolve.

We can see the aspiration to what Hegel calls 'absolute freedom', or universal and total participation, as the attempt to meet an endemic need of modern society. Traditional societies were founded

on differentiation: royalty, aristocracy, common folk; priests and laymen; free and serf, and so on. This differentiation was justified as a reflection of a hierarchical order of things. After the revolution of modern, self-defining subjectivity, these conceptions of cosmic order came to be seen as fictions, and were denounced as the fraudulent inventions of kings, priests and aristocrats to keep their subjects submissive. But however much they may have been used, consciously or not, as justifications of the *status quo*, these conceptions also were the ground of men's identification with the society in which they lived. Man could only be himself in relation to a cosmic order; the state claimed to body forth this order and hence to be one of man's principal channels of contact with it. Hence the power of organic and holistic metaphors: men saw themselves as parts of society in something like the way that a hand, for instance, is part of the body.

The revolution of modern subjectivity gave rise to another type of political theory. Society was justified not by what it was or expressed, but by what it achieved, the fulfilment of men's needs, desires and purposes. Society came to be seen as an instrument, and its different modes and structures were to be studied scientifically for their effects on human happiness. Political theory would banish myth and fable. This reached clearest expression in utilitarianism.

But this modern theory has not provided a basis for men's identification with their society. In the intermittent crises of alienation which have followed the breakdown of traditional society, utilitarian theories have been powerless to fill the gap. So that modern societies have actually functioned with a large part of their traditional outlook intact, or only slowly receding (as in the case of Britain). Or when some radical break is sought, they have had recourse to more powerful stuff, some variant of the general-will tradition (Jacobinism, Marxism, anarchism) as a revolutionary ideology. Or modern societies have had recourse either in revolutionary or 'normal' times to the powerful secular religion of nationalism. And even societies which seem to be founded on the utilitarian tradition, or an earlier, Lockeian variant, like the United States, in fact have recourse to 'myth', for example the myth of the frontier, of the perpetual new beginning, the future as boundlessly open to self-creation.

This last is the greatest irony of all, in that the utilitarian theory itself leaves no place for myth of this kind, for speculative interpretation of the ends of human life in their relation to society, nature and history, as part of the justifying beliefs of a mature

society. These are thought to belong to earlier, less evolved ages. Mature men are attached to their society because of what it produces for them. As recently as a decade ago this perspective was widely believed in by the liberal intelligentsia of America and the Western world, who announced an imminent 'end of ideology'. But they turned out to be latter-day, inverted variants of Monsieur Jourdain, who were speaking not prose but myth without knowing it. It is now clearer that the utilitarian perspective is no less an ideology than its major rivals, and no more plausible. Utilitarian man whose loyalty to his society would be contingent only on the satisfactions it secured for individuals is a species virtually without members. And the very notion of satisfaction is now not so firmly anchored, once we see that it is interwoven with 'expectations', and beliefs about what is appropriate and just. Some of the richest societies in our day are among the most teeming with dissatisfaction.

The aspiration to absolute freedom can be seen as an attempt to fill this lack in modern political theory, to find grounds for identification with one's society which are fully in the spirit of modern subjectivity. We have grounds for identifying ourselves with our society and giving our full allegiance to it when it is ours in the strong sense of being our creation, and moreover the creation of what is best in us and most truly ourselves: our moral will (Rousseau, Fichte) or our creative activity (Marx). From Rousseau through Marx and the anarchist thinkers to contemporary theories of participatory democracy, there have been recurrent demands to reconstruct society, so as to do away with heteronomy, or overcome alienation, or recover spontaneity. Only a society which was an emanation of free moral will could recover a claim on our allegiance comparable to that of traditional society. For once more society would reflect or embody something of absolute value. Only this would no longer be a cosmic order; in keeping with the modern revolution, the absolute would be human freedom itself.

The aspiration to absolute freedom is therefore born of a deep dissatisfaction with the utilitarian model of society as an instrument for the furtherance/adjustment of interests. Societies built on this model are experienced as a spiritual desert or as a machine. They express nothing spiritual, and their regulations and discipline are felt as an intolerable imposition by those who aspire to absolute freedom. It is therefore not surprising that the theorists of absolute freedom have often been close to the reactionary critics of liberal society, and have often themselves expressed admiration for earlier societies.

Hegel understood this aspiration. As we saw, he made the demand for radical autonomy a central part of his theory. He has indeed an important place in the line of development of this aspiration to absolute freedom as it develops from Rousseau through Marx and beyond. For he wove the demand for radical autonomy of Rousseau and Kant together with the expressivist theory which came from Herder, and this provided the indispensable background for Marx's thought. And yet he was a strong critic of radical freedom. This alone would make it worth while to examine his objections.

Disentangled from Hegel's particular theory of social differentiation, the basic point of this critique is this: absolute freedom requires homogeneity. It cannot brook differences which would prevent everyone participating totally in the decisions of the society. And what is even more, it requires some near unanimity of will to emerge from this deliberation, for otherwise the majority would just be imposing its will on the minority, and freedom would not be universal. But differentiation of some fairly essential kinds are ineradicable. (Let us leave aside for the moment the objection that Hegel did not identify the right ones.) Moreover they are recognized in our post-Romantic climate as essential to human identity. Men cannot simply identify themselves as men, but they define themselves more immediately by their partial community, cultural, linguistic, confessional and so on. Modern democracy is therefore in a bind.

I think a dilemma of this kind can be seen in contemporary society. Modern societies have moved towards much greater homogeneity and greater interdependence, so that partial communities lose their autonomy and to some extent their identity. But great differences remain; only because of the ideology of homogeneity, these differential characteristics no longer have meaning and value for those who have them. Thus the rural population is taught by the mass media to see itself as just lacking in some of the advantages of a more advanced life style. The poor are seen as marginal to the society, for instance in America, and in some ways have a worse lot than in more recognizedly class-divided societies.

Homogenization thus increases minority alienation and resentment. And the first response of liberal society is to try even more of the same: programmes to eliminate poverty, or assimilate Indians, move population out of declining regions, bring an urban way of life to the countryside etc. But the radical response is to convert this sense of alienation into a demand for 'absolute freedom'. The idea

is to overcome alienation by creating a society in which everyone, including the present 'out' groups, participates fully in the decisions.

But both these solutions would simply aggravate the problem, which is that homogenization has undermined the communities or characteristics by which people formerly identified themselves and put nothing in their place. What does step into the gap almost everywhere is ethnic or national identity. Nationalism has become the most powerful focus of identity in modern society. The demand for radical freedom can and frequently does join up with nationalism, and is given a definite impetus and direction from this.

But unless this happens the aspiration to absolute freedom is unable to resolve the dilemma. It attempts to overcome the alienation of a mass society by mass participation. But the very size, complexity and interdependence of modern society makes this increasingly difficult on technical grounds alone. What is more serious, the increasing alienation in a society which has eroded its traditional foci of allegiance makes it harder and harder to achieve the basic consensus, to bring everyone to the 'general will', which is essential for radical democracy. As the traditional limits fade with the grounds for accepting them, society tends to fragment; partial groups become increasingly truculent in their demands, as they see less reason to compromise with the 'system'.

But the radical demand for participation can do nothing to stem this fragmentation. Participation of *all* in a decision is only possible if there is a ground of agreement, or of underlying common purpose. Radical participation cannot create this; it presupposes it. This is the point which Hegel repeatedly makes. The demand for absolute freedom by itself is empty. Hegel stresses one line of possible consequences, that emptiness leads to pure destructiveness. But he also mentions another in his discussion in the *PhG*. For in fact some direction has to be given to society, and hence a group can take over and imprint its own purpose on society claiming to represent the general will. They thus 'solve' the problem of diversity by force. Contemporary communist societies provide examples of this. And whatever can be said for them they can certainly not be thought of as models of freedom. Moreover their solution to the emptiness of absolute freedom is in a sense only provisional. The problem of what social goals to choose or structures to adopt is solved by the exigencies of mobilization and combat towards the free society. Society can be set a definite task because it has to build the *preconditions* of communism, either in defeating class enemies or in constructing a modern economy. Such societies would be in

disarray if ever the period of mobilization were to end (which is why it would end only over the dead bodies of the ruling party).

But an ideology of participation which does not want to take this totalitarian road of general mobilization cannot cope with the complexity and fragmentation of a large-scale contemporary society. Many of its protagonists see this, and return to the original Rousseauian idea of a highly decentralized federation of communities. But in the meantime the growth of a large homogeneous society has made this much less feasible. It is not just that with our massive concentration of population and economic interdependence a lot of decisions have to be taken for the whole society, and decentralization gives us no way of coping with these. More serious is the fact that homogenization has undermined the partial communities which would naturally have been the basis of such a decentralized federation in the past. There is no advantage in an artificial carving up of society into manageable units. If in fact no one identifies strongly with these units, participation will be minimal, as we see in much of our urban politics today.

Thus Hegel's dilemma for modern democracy, put at its simplest, is this: the modern ideology of equality and of total participation leads to a homogenization of society. This shakes men loose from their traditional communities, but cannot replace them as a focus of identity. Or rather, it can only replace them as such a focus under the impetus of militant nationalism or some totalitarian ideology which would depreciate or even crush diversity and individuality. It would be a focus for some and would reduce the others to mute alienation. Hegel constantly stresses that the tight unity of the Greek city state cannot be recaptured in the modern world that has known the principle of individual freedom.

Thus the attempt to fill the gap by moving towards a society of universal and total participation, where it is not actually harmful in suppressing freedom, is vain. It can only aggravate the problem by intensifying homogenization, while offering no relief since absolute freedom by itself is empty and cannot offer a focus of identity. And besides, total participation is unrealizable in a large-scale society. In fact ideologies of absolute freedom only produce something in the hands of a minority with a powerful vision which it is willing to impose.

The only real cure for this malady, a recovery of meaningful differentiation, is closed for modern society precisely because of its commitment to ideologies which constantly press it towards greater homogeneity. Some of the differences which remain are depreciated,

and are breeding-grounds for alienation and resentment. Others in fact fill the gap and become foci of identity. These are principally ethnic or national differences. But they tend to be exclusive and divisive. They can only with difficulty form the basis of a differentiated society. On the contrary, multinational states have great trouble surviving in the modern world. Nationalism tends to lead to single homogeneous states. Where nationalism is strong, it tends to provide the common focus of identity and to fend off fragmentation. But then it is in danger of suppressing dissent and diversity and falling over into a narrow and irrational chauvinism.

Hegel gave little importance to nationalism. And this was the cause of his failure to foresee its pivotal role in the modern world. As an allegiance it was not rational enough, too close to pure sentiment, to have an important place in the foundations of the state. But it is also true that it cannot provide what modern society needs in his view. And this is a ground for differentiation, meaningful to the people concerned, which at the same time does not set the partial communities against each other, but rather knits them together in a larger whole.

This in a single formula is what modern society would require to resolve its dilemma. It is something which traditional societies had. For the point about conceptions of cosmic order or organic analogies is that they gave a meaning to differences between social groups which also bound them into one. But how to recover this in modern society? Hegel's answer, as we saw it, is to give social and political differentiation a meaning by seeing them as expressive of cosmic order, but he conceives this order as the final and complete fulfilment of the modern aspiration to autonomy. It is an order founded on reason alone, and hence is the ultimate object of the free will.

We can see now more clearly how the two levels of Hegel's thought on the necessary differentiation of society meshed with each other. On one level, there is the set of considerations drawn from a comparison with the Greek *polis*: the size of the modern state, the great differences which a state must encompass once all the functions are to be performed by citizens, the modern notion of individuality. These will be generally accepted by everyone though their significance might be disputed. On the other level, there is the necessary articulation of the Idea which has to be reflected in society. In Hegel's mind these do not operate as quite separate orders of consideration, as I have set them out here. They are intricated in each other, so that Hegel sees the existing social differentiations of his time as reflecting the articulations of the Idea, or rather as

preparing a perfectly adequate reflection as the Idea realizes itself in history. And that is of course why he did not see these differences as remnants of earlier history destined to wither away, as the radical thinkers of this time thought, but rather as approaching the lineaments of a state which would finally be 'adequate to the Concept'.

We cannot accept Hegel's solution today. But the dilemma it was meant to solve remains. It was the dilemma which de Tocqueville tried to grapple with in different terms, when he saw the immense importance to a democratic polity of vigorous constituent communities in a decentralized structure of power, while at the same time the pull of equality tended to take modern society towards uniformity and perhaps also submission under an omnipotent government. This convergence is perhaps not all that surprising in two thinkers who were both deeply influenced by Montesquieu and who both had a deep and sympathetic understanding of the past as well as of the wave of the future. But whether we take it in Hegel's reading or in de Tocqueville's, one of the great needs of the modern democratic polity is to recover a sense of significant differentiation, so that its partial communities, be they geographical, or cultural, or occupational, can become again important centres of concern and activity for their members in a way which connects them to the whole.

7. THE OWL OF MINERVA

Returning now to Hegel's reading of the French Revolution, we can see how the drive to absolute freedom had to fail. Being hostile to *any* articulation, it was incapable of rebuilding a new society on the ruins of the old through which men could once more be linked with the universal. It could come 'to no positive realization [*Werk*], to no universal achievements [*Werken*] either in the domain of speech or in reality, neither to laws or universal institutions of conscious freedom, nor to deeds and achievements [*Werken*] of practical [*wollenden*] freedom' (*PhG*, 417). But then its entire energy has to be spent negatively. Faced with the existing society, the *ancien régime*, the aspiration to absolute freedom was driven to destroy its institutions, to level its differentiation. But since it could not produce anything in its place, absolute freedom was stuck in this negative moment; its energy could only be spent in continued destruction. 'Universal freedom can produce no positive work or deed; only *negative action* remains to it; it is only the *fury* of destruction' (*PhG*, 413).

This is Hegel's derivation of the Terror. The Terror was not an accidental consequence of the aspirations of the Jacobins and the other radicals of the French Revolution. The vacuity of this demand for freedom as such, what Hegel calls (in *PR*, §5) 'negative freedom' or the 'freedom of the void' which flies 'from every content as from a restriction', we have seen on a philosophical level in the emptiness of Kant's criterion of universalization. Now it erupts on to the political scene in the fanatical refusal of any differentiated structure. The revolution may 'imagine that it is willing some positive state of affairs, such as universal equality', but in fact it can realize nothing. For

> such actuality leads at once to some sort of order, to a particularization of organizations and individuals alike; while it is precisely out of the annihilation of particularity and objective characterization that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds. Consequently, what negative freedom intends to will can never be anything but an abstract idea, and giving effect to this idea can only be the fury of destruction. (*PR*, §5)

But what can it destroy when the whole regime is in ruins? The answer is itself, its own children. For in fact the aspiration to total and complete participation is rigorously impossible. In fact some group has to run the show, has to be the government. This group is really a faction. But this it cannot admit, for it would undermine its legitimacy. On the contrary it claims to be the embodiment of the general will. All other factions are treated as criminal; and so they must be, since they seek to escape from and thwart the general will. They seek to separate themselves from the universal and total participation. They set themselves up as private wills, and therefore they must be crushed.

But actually participating in a faction is not necessary. Since the basic concept of legitimacy is the general will, even those whose *wills* are hostile and refractory, whether or not they act to oppose the revolutionary government, are enemies of freedom and of the people. In times of stress and crisis these too must be dealt with. But of course ill will cannot be proved in the same way as counter-revolutionary activity. If we wish to strike at all the enemies of the will as well as those of the deed, then we have to go on the basis of reasonable suspicion by patriots. 'Being *under suspicion* thus comes to take the place of being *guilty*, or has the same meaning and consequences' (*PhG*, 419). Hegel thus derives the revolutionary *loi des suspects* of the height of the Terror; and at the same time he states the basis of future terrors for whom refractory intention has

been made equivalent to criminal action ('objectively' although not 'subjectively').

The Terror also has a characteristic attitude towards its enemies and their liquidation. The essence of humanity is to be found in the general will; man's real self is there, the content of his freedom. What opposes the general will can only be the irrational, whatever there is in man of deformed misanthropy or perverse caprice. In doing away with such enemies one is not killing really autonomous men, whose opposition is rooted in their own independent identity, but empty, refractory, punctual selves which have no more human content. Their death is therefore 'a death which has no inner scope and represents no fulfilment, for what is negated is a point void of content, that of the absolutely free self; it is thus the coldest, flattest death, with no more significance than cutting through a cabbage head or throwing back a draught of water' (*PhG*, 418–19).

In these prophetic passages, Hegel delineates the modern phenomenon of the political terror, which we have become even more sickeningly familiar with than the men of his time: a terror which sweeps aside 'enemies of the people' in the name of a real will which is definitive of humanity; a terror which thus escalates beyond active opponents to engulf suspects. This by itself is not new. The court of any tyrant has always known the execution of people on suspicion. But in the modern political terror the suspicion is no longer based on any calculus of likelihood of hostile action. It escalates beyond this to punish the refractory or simply the lukewarm will for itself, because this is the essence of the crime against humanity; not to belong to its forward march. And with this the victims are read out of the ranks of humanity, so that they can be treated like vermin. So that highly civilized nations outdid the worst barbarisms of Genghis Khan and Attila. And the perversion of this ideology of the collective will through its mixture with racism surpassed all previous human criminality.

In Hegel's view, terror, or at least destructive fury, is endemic to the drive for absolute freedom itself. It cannot brook any standing structures, even its own past creations, which are not an emanation of contemporary active will. Consequently, it feels true to itself only in the work of demolition. 'Only in destroying something does this negative will possess the feeling of itself as existent' (*PR*, §5). We can readily imagine what Hegel would have thought of Mao's Cultural Revolution, and in general of the contemporary revolutionary's fear of bureaucratization. What Hegel did not foresee was how positive goals and structures can be imposed in the name

of absolute freedom, and how very much more terrible that can be.

Hegel's analysis of the French Revolution sees it therefore as the final culmination of the Enlightenment, the climax of its inner contradiction. The Enlightenment is the apex of the movement of spiritualization of man in modern times. It is conscious of the fact that man is the bearer of rational will, and that nothing can stand in the way of rational will. It has disengaged itself from all the 'positive', from the acceptance of any simply existing institution and the irrational authority of the past. But blinded by the narrow focus of 'understanding' it cannot see that man is the vehicle of a greater subject. It defines man alone as the source of rational will. And as a result it can find no content for this will. It can only destroy. It ends up therefore destroying itself and its own children.

What happens then in Hegel's reading is that the state goes back to a rediscovered differentiation. But this is not just going back to square one. For something has been gained. There has been a sweeping away of the old positive structures, the irrational past, or rather one might say the past institutions which were only an imperfect embodiment of rationality. The institutions of the *ancien régime* had to go under, to make room for the new revivified structures which would replace them.

Thus the state which has truly incorporated the world-historical shift represented by the French Revolution is a restored differentiated state. It has some continuity, as we shall see, with the structure of estates which preceded it, but it is restructured and above all founded on reason. This is the state structure which Hegel delineates for us in the *PR*.

It is important to note that for Hegel this state's arrival on the scene of history, its realization, matches its nature. Just as it is not seen as an emanation of human will *simpliciter*, so it is not brought about by conscious human planning. True, it comes about by men's actions in history; but what is going on here is always more than the men themselves expect. The French Revolutionaries left their skin in an attempt to do the impossible, yet they played their part in clearing the ground for the new state. Napoleon was driven to conquer Europe, to seize power for himself, and what resulted from this was the restored state. Even the disastrous consequences played their part, since the Terror had the effect Hegel attributes to any close brush with death. It brought men back to the universal, and hence facilitated the founding of the new state (*PhG*, 420). This is the cunning of reason.

Here we come to a crucial difference between Hegel and Marx.

In Hegel's critique of absolute freedom, we see him squaring accounts with Rousseau and the French Revolution. But this was also a critique by anticipation of Marx.[1] For Marx also believes that in the end we come to a society of universal and total participation, that we win through by overcoming the division of labour to a new homogeneity. And Marx's refusal of Hegel's differentiation was based on precisely the issue which, as we saw, ultimately divided Hegel from the Revolutionaries: the freedom of the end of history is for Marx a purely human freedom, not the fulfilment of *Geist*. Consequently its realization is a conscious act.

Hence while Marx takes up Hegel's concept of the cunning of reason, this fails to apply to the last great revolution. In Marxist thought the bourgeois and earlier political actors cannot understand the significance of their acts; they do more and other than they think. But this is not true of the proletariat. These have in Marxism a scientific view of things. In this case the significance of their innovative action is understood by the actors.

In Marx the equivalent thesis to the cunning of reason is based on the notion of a species nature of man. What gives the hidden significance to men's actions in history is the as yet unknown nature of man. But with the breaching of the last contradiction, this comes to consciousness. Men see what they are, and since the agent is generic man, those who are capable of acting at the level of humanity as a whole, the proletariat, can see clearly what they are doing. To put it another way the unseen agent in history, what corresponds to Hegel's 'reason', is generic man. As long as generic man is in contradiction to his actual historical embodiment, in class society, then man cannot be clear what he is doing. But once this contradiction is overcome, as it is with the proletariat, his action is self-conscious.

For Hegel, on the other hand, man is never clear what he is doing at the time; for the agency is not simply man. We are all caught up as agents in a drama we do not really understand. Only when we have played it out do we understand what has been afoot all the time. The owl of Minerva flies at the coming of the dusk.

In an important way therefore the agency is not fully ours. We did not design and plan the rational state and will it into existence. It grew through history. It grew in the institutions which came out of the German forests and developed through the Middle Ages, the

[1] Though Marx, who has his own variant of the Hegelian principle of embodiment and sees man set in the matrix of nature, in part escapes this criticism. See discussion below in chapter 3.

institutions of kingship and estates which became constitutional monarchy. These institutions needed to be altered, purified, rationalized. Even this was not done to plan, but rather arose through the cunning of reason out of the activities of Revolutionaries and a great conquering general who had other goals.

If for Hegel's political theory the state must be made in conformity with reason, it follows from his philosophy of history, according to which reason (Spirit) realizes itself, that this does not come about by some men seeing the blueprint of reason and building a state on the basis of it. That reason realizes itself means that the outcome arises out of human action which is not really conscious of what it is doing, which acts while seeing through a glass very darkly, but which is guided by the cunning of reason.

Moreover, even if by some strange time-warp men could have got the correct formula of the state ahead of time, it still could not just have been applied. For an integral part of this formula is that men identify themselves with the realized public life. But this cannot simply be turned on at will; it is something which develops over time in the depths of our unconscious spiritual life. That is why Hegel says one cannot just implant a good constitution anywhere – as Napoleon discovered in Spain. The *Sittlichkeit* of the Spanish people was uncombinable with that kind of liberalism.[1]

And similarly the *Sittlichkeit* of the right constitution grows slowly, and grows only in certain people and at a certain pace and in certain conditions. It is not just an unfortunate accident that the understanding of it does not come until it is there. Rather the understanding does not come because before it is there men are not yet grown up to this *Sittlichkeit*, and it is small wonder that they cannot conceive it. They have their own *Sittlichkeit*, but this has not yet attained the fullness of rationality. Its growth is not understood, because it involves a growth of reason, a growth in reason, and the higher stages of such a growth cannot be understood from the vantage point of the lower. The growth has to have taken place before we can understand it.

As a culmination of the growth of reason, the rational state cannot be fully understood before it is on the scene. And if one could have flashed it back to some men, they would have been powerless to effect it, for it could not have been understood, much less identified with by their contemporaries.

The idea of just designing a constitution and then putting it into practice is an Enlightenment idea. It treats the whole affair as

[1] *PR*, §274, addition.

an engineering problem, an external matter of means and design. But a constitution requires certain conditions in men's identity, how they understand self; and hence this Enlightenment idea is radically shallow. To try in philosophy to transcend one's age is like trying to jump over Rhodes (preface to *PR*, 11).

We cannot describe Hegel's realized state here. But its broad lines should be evident from the philosophy of history which we have been examining. It will be a state which somehow combines the universal subjectivity of Socrates and Christ with the *Sittlichkeit* of the ancients. It will be a state whose *Sittlichkeit* is such that universal individuals can identify with it.

> The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself. (*PR*, §260)

It will have achieved this because both sides will have moved to meet each other. The universal subjectivity will have come to see that it must find embodiment in a state, and will also have taken the further step of realizing that this cannot be a state founded simply on human will, but rather on man's will as an emanation of *Geist*; hence that the individual must take his place in a wider order, with which he nevertheless identifies because it is the embodiment of reason.

The universal subjectivity will thus have understood that he cannot simply create the rational society, that he must also find it there as an order which unfolds in history. And when he does this he can step beyond individualism and once more return to the 'ethical conviction' (*sittliche Gesinnung*), the inner sense of being one with a realized order, where the highest form of freedom is found.

But at the same time the order itself had to evolve. It had to become in conformity with reason, so that the universal subject can be at home (*bei sich*), and identify with it as his *Sittlichkeit*.

This evolution, thinks Hegel, has now taken place. The strivings of reason to remake the world in conformity with reason have been shipwrecked. But in the process they brought about a rationalization of the state which their authors did not yet properly conceive. They swept away the old positive, so that the state which arose after the cataclysm was not simply in continuity with the past but purified. Rational men, after developing their subjectivity to the full, are now ready to identify with this new state. The task of philosophy is to further this identification by laying bare the rational foundation of

the real, and through this identification the rational state will come to completion.

8. A POST-INDUSTRIAL 'SITTLICHKEIT'

What relevance for today can we glean from this brief sketch of Hegel's philosophy of history and politics? As we saw above, Hegel insisted that all viable societies must be meaningfully articulated, and this raised the issue of the voluntary cohesion of modern societies. How can free societies, societies whose institutions can only function with widespread voluntary participation, maintain their unity and their vitality? It is an issue which the liberal era tended to lose sight of, taking the unity of liberal society for granted. But it is an important question in the tradition of political theory, on which Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu, among others, had something to say. We are beginning to rediscover its importance today, now that our societies are threatened with breakup.

It was a central issue for Hegel, nourished as he was on Aristotle and Montesquieu. He had shared with his generation the nostalgia for the free states of ancient Greece, with which their citizens identified so profoundly that the city's life was the centre of theirs. The *polis* was the paradigm historical case from which Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* derived; and it is with this concept and those related to it that Hegel comes to grips with the issue of free societies.

Sittlichkeit refers to that dimension of our ethical obligations which are to a larger life which we have to sustain and continue. The *sittlich* dimension is important in men's ethical life where they have a profound identification with their society and its institutions. Where they do not, where what is of central importance to them lies elsewhere, we have what Hegel characterizes as alienation. Hegel, following in this Montesquieu and a long tradition, does not believe that a free society can be sustained without this kind of identification which sustains a vital *Sittlichkeit.*

Hegel's concepts of *Sittlichkeit* and alienation, although related to the tradition, open a new way of treating the requirements of a free society. But when this issue is dealt with in modern political science it is usually by means of the concept of 'legitimacy', and this in a way which breaks entirely from the tradition in which Hegel stood. 'Legitimacy' is defined in terms of the subjective orientations of the members of a polity towards this polity and its institutions. In scientific discourse, institutions are not characterized as legitimate or illegitimate as such; 'legitimacy' characterizes

rather the way they are seen by those who live under them, or what these people feel about them. This approach is, of course, fully in keeping with the attempt of modern social science to keep its descriptions and explanations free from evaluation, to make science 'value-free'.

But the requirement of value-freedom means that when this science characterizes polities and institutions themselves, it must steer clear of any of those terms which are properly used to describe people's orientations to these institutions. Properly speaking we ought not to describe a society's institutions as embodying or expressing a certain conception of man and of his relation to society – except in the limiting case where these institutions were set up to embody this conception. For the true locus of the conception is in the minds of people, who can see their institutions as in some sense realizing their ideas. If the institutions were not *designed* to embody the ideas, then they can perhaps entrench or encourage or awaken certain conceptions of man and society but not embody or express them.

Similarly, we ought not to speak of a society and its institutions as embodying a certain quality of community spirit. The institutions may encourage or enjoin certain kinds of action which are seen or felt by people as expressing community spirit. But community spirit is in the last analysis a matter of people's 'subjective orientations'; it cannot reside in the institutions themselves.

This science must thus make use of a stripped-down language to characterize polities and institutions. It will understand institutions as patterns of action, which shape how men behave, and either frustrate or facilitate their purposes. But it cannot look on them in an *expressive* dimension, as embodying certain conceptions or a certain quality of life.

The contrast with the Hegelian vocabulary of *Sittlichkeit* is immediately evident. We saw in chapter 2.3 that the Hegelian notion of 'objective spirit' carries precisely this idea that our institutions and practices embody a certain view of ourselves both as individuals and social beings. This Hegelian vocabulary therefore provides the basis for an alternative way of understanding society, strongly at variance with the mainstream of modern political science.

Just how different these two ways are will become evident if we look at a major contemporary issue, the rising tension and disunity within many Western democratic polities. In the terms of modern political science there is a decline in 'legitimacy'. But what are its

causes? 'Legitimacy' ultimately refers us to people's subjective orientations, so what we are looking for is what can cause a change in these. Some obvious candidates come to mind: that the institutions have frustrated important goals of individuals, so that they have become disaffected. Or perhaps, while the 'output' of the institutions has remained constant or even improved, 'expectations' have risen even faster, and this has led to frustration, and hence disaffection. Or else people's 'values' have changed in some fashion that we can perhaps explain psychologically, or by changes at other levels of society, like the family; and the result is that the existing institutions no longer meet widely held norms. For instance, somewhat bureaucratized representative institutions seem impossibly authoritarian to a generation brought up in a more open and permissive way.

Explanations of all these kinds have been canvassed. And some might contain an element of truth. But what they have in common is that they do not attempt to account for the change in people's orientations by the evolution of society itself. This can only influence how people feel by its 'output', by delivering or failing to deliver the goods. But the important decline of legitimacy today is plainly not due simply to 'output failure', but much more to a change in people's expectations and outlook. The important questions we have to answer are: what makes expectations rise? what underlies the change in values? And to answer these questions we have to look at psychology, or the development of the family, or to some such other level of study.

By contrast, Hegel's vocabulary opens a quite different approach. The rising tension and disunity are understood in terms of alienation; and alienation arises where the important ideas of man and society and their relation to nature embodied in the institutions of a given society cease to be those by which its members identify themselves. Thus it was, as we saw, that the individual with a universal moral consciousness ceased to be able to identify himself with the parochial *polis*, whose consequent breakdown was succeeded (on Hegel's reading) by the centuries of alienation.

This vocabulary of *Sittlichkeit* and alienation offers another way of trying to account for the shift in people's allegiance. Perhaps an understanding of the ideas of man that a given society embodies in its institutions, coupled with an understanding of its development, can help to explain the rise of alienation, or (to use the other vocabulary) the decline of 'legitimacy'.

A speculative example may help to clarify this possibility. This

account is not drawn from Hegel, of course, but it is fully in the spirit of the Hegelian account.

Perhaps one of the important grounds of cohesion of modern societies has been the identity of man as producer, that is, a being capable of transforming society to suit his ends, and more, to engage in a progressively more and more far-reaching transformation. To the extent that men saw themselves this way they tended to see society as a great collaborative enterprise in which human power becomes multiplied many times over through the combination of technology and social collaboration.

There is a Marxist variant of this self-vision, in which the moving subject is the collective, social labour has for its fundamental subject society, and man is defined by his 'generic being' (*Gattungs-wesen*). But in the 'Western' variant, the sense of control over nature which confirms the producer in his identity is meant to be at the disposal of the individual. This is one of the reasons why Western producers' societies are so consumer-oriented. Social labour is seen as a collaborative enterprise of free individuals, whose relations can be constantly shaped anew through negotiations and common decisions.

This conception of man comes in the domain of *Sittlichkeit* because it is not just an idea in people's heads. Indeed, as a clear conception it may be in the heads of very few people. But it is entrenched in many of the institutions and practices of our society, in our 'free enterprise', consumer economy, in which welfare is measured individually by command over consumer goods and collectively by the rise in GNP, in all the mechanisms for the negotiated adjustment of interest, in the central importance accorded to production as a goal and so on.

As long as men identify themselves as producers participating in the large collaborative enterprise, that is, as long as this conception of man is of fundamental importance to them, and is at least one of the conceptions out of which they determine the significance things have for them, so long does a society with these institutions maintain its cohesion. Alienation arises when this identity slips, when men no longer easily can define themselves by this conception.

But having identified the underlying conception of this society, or one of them, may help us to account for the growth of alienation. Thus we can see that the producers' identity we have just outlined is essentially concerned with growth. It can only be satisfied with continued growth in production and control over nature. Now if the evolution of such a society brings it to a stage where the value of unlimited growth cannot but come into question, this will provoke a

crisis. The identity which is essential to its *Sittlichkeit* will come under challenge and alienation threaten. From this point of view, our contemporary crisis of *Sittlichkeit* may be partly brought on by our increasing awareness of the costs of growth in pollution, overcrowding, social dislocation and the impending threat of severe limits to growth.

Or it may be that the self-understanding proper to such a producers' society bent on growth cannot but engender a set of continually rising expectations, whose very endlessness ensures that they will at some point encounter frustration, and hence increasing social tension and strain on the disciplines of society. This in turn could provoke a crisis of uncertainty around this basic identity.

These explanations, although drawn from contemporary comment and reflection, are very much in the line of Hegel's thought. The producers' society corresponds to the level of social existence which Hegel calls 'civil society', and which is concerned with the reciprocal meeting of needs. But the point of introducing it here is simply to illustrate the kind of explanation which Hegel's conceptual scheme makes possible. As against the mainstream of political science for which the shifts in people's 'values' or 'expectations' remain either inexplicable starting points in their account, or must be explained on some quite other level of analysis, the Hegelian account attempts to explain them in relation to the evolution of the society itself, understood in terms of the underlying conceptions it embodies and the definitions of identity which are essential to it.

Thus the claim that I want to make here for the importance of Hegel's thought today turns in part on the thesis that this kind of account provides an essential insight into the development of contemporary society; that modern political science is crippled by its conceptual limitations in its attempt to understand our present context of threatened breakdown. It was this kind of context which Hegel pondered about very profoundly, in both ancient and modern examples, and from which he developed his rich language of *Sittlichkeit* and alienation.

My claim is precisely that the utility of the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit* more than compensates for the fact that Hegel's answer to the problem of *Sittlichkeit*, the evolution of a society founded on the Idea, is a complete non-starter for us today. We cannot accept Hegel's answer, but his posing of the problem is still one of the most acute and penetrating available to us.

But if the general concepts of Hegel's political philosophy are

useful to us today, so is much of his detailed analysis. We began to see this in his account of the French Revolution.

In fact Hegel was wildly wrong in 'calling' the development of modern society. We saw above that he thought the French Revolution would be followed by a period in which a new *Sittlichkeit* based on the Idea would grow to fruition. This would contain the destructive tendencies of the aspirations to freedom that came to the fore in the Revolution. It would give a new focus to these aspirations, one which would give a content to the ambition to build a society on rational will, a content it would draw from the ontological structure of things.

In fact what has happened is that the two tendencies that Hegel identified in the Enlightenment, the utilitarian, atomist social engineering, and the drive to absolute freedom through the realization of the general will, have continued to shape the development of modern society. Hegel's analysis of these is extraordinarily deep and perceptive, and becomes very relevant for us precisely because (paradoxically) their importance in modern society is so much greater than he thought.

Hegel's account of the utilitarian, atomist streak in modern society is not confined to the analysis of utilitarianism as a mode of consciousness. More important is the Hegelian analysis of the modern productive economy of emancipated bourgeois society. We find this in the passages on civil society in his philosophy of right, and in the early unpublished works of the Jena period which dealt with the same topic.[1]

These works show a remarkable anticipation by Hegel of some of the themes and insights later developed by Marx. Hegel sees that modern industrial production tends to an increasing and ramifying division of labour, and along with this the creation of a proletariat. Hegel holds that if the process of increasingly ramified production is left to itself, the proletariat will be impoverished, materially by low wages and uncertainty of employment, and spiritually by the narrowness and monotony of its work.

Impoverishment will if unchecked set off recurrent crises of overproduction, so that the underprivileged can only be maintained

[1] The works concerned are the 'System der Sittlichkeit' of 1801–2 (published in G. Lasson (ed.), *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, Leipzig, 1923), and two earlier attempts at a system, also of the Jena period, which have been called *Jenaer Realphilosophie* I and II (published by J. Hoffmeister, respectively Leipzig, 1932 and Hamburg, 1967). These works were unpublished in Hegel's lifetime, and were only given serious attention fairly recently. Cf. the interesting discussion in Schlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (C.U.P., 1972), pp. 87–98.

on welfare. But the recourse to welfare contradicts the principle of the bourgeois economy whereby men should work for their living. And Hegel makes, in 1821, this fatefully prescient remark: 'It hence becomes apparent that despite an excess of wealth civil society is not rich enough, i.e., its own resources are insufficient to check excessive poverty and the creation of a penurious rabble' (*PR*, §245).

The 'penurious rabble' may seem a thing of the past, but the inability to check poverty is still the galling experience of our affluent, technological societies, which eats away at the unity and solidarity of every modern community. And it was just for this reason that Hegel feared the 'penurious rabble', for he saw it as the source of a growing alienation which would ruin the modern *Sittlichkeit* if left unchecked.

Hegel seemed to believe that this new rational law state founded on the Idea could check the bourgeois economy and hold it in limits. But however wrong he was about this he was extraordinarily insightful and prescient to discern the social direction implicit in this economy, and to see this as having a momentum of its own that could in fact sweep men along uncomprehending in its wake. In an early work ('System der Sittlichkeit', 80–1), he describes the system of division of labour and exchange as an 'alien power' (*fremde Macht*), operating by its own laws, and disposing of people's lives as an 'unconscious, blind fate' (*bewustloses, blindes Schicksal*).

This is one aspect of the destructive potential of modern society which Hegel discerned. The dangers inherent in the drive to absolute freedom as Hegel saw them have already been discussed above. Hegel thought he discerned in these the two great disruptive forces which threaten the modern state. The first is the force of private interest, inherent in civil society and in its mode of production, which constantly threatens to overrun all limits, polarize the society between rich and poor, and dissolve the bonds of the state. The second is the diametrically opposed attempt to overcome this and all other divisions by sweeping away all differentiation in the name of the general will and the true society of equals, an attempt which must issue, Hegel thinks, in violence and the dictatorship of a revolutionary elite.

There is a third trend in modern society which Hegel sees as being sustained by both these forces, and which is that towards homogenization. For it is not only the drive towards absolute freedom which sweeps aside all differentiations; the development of the capitalist economy has also meant the disruption of traditional

community, the mass migrations of populations, and the creation of a unified market and as much as possible a unified labour force. And all this has contributed to the homogenization of modern society, the creation of one large society in which cultural sub-groups are progressively eroded, or only survive at the periphery of life, in domestic customs or folklore.

This drive continues today. Under the impact of both radical egalitarianism and liberal individualism all deeply rooted social differentiations have come under attack, not only those forms which are based on birth and social position, but even the biologically based one, that between the sexes. The modern notion of equality will suffer no differences in the field of opportunity which individuals have before them. Before they choose, individuals must be interchangeable; or alternatively put, any differences must be chosen. The emphasis on choice in the contemporary principle of equality reflects its marriage with a radical notion of freedom, as self-creation.

Together these two have swept aside all the articulations of traditional society, and have set themselves to combat the new ones which have arisen. As we look over the history of the last two centuries, there seems to be an unmistakable trend, in which stage by stage differences are set aside and neutralized, culminating in a society in which everyone (at least in theory) will stand equal with all the others before a potentially limitless field of possibilities. In the name of this equality in freedom we are now undergoing a profound revolution in the status of women, and even to some extent in that of minors (e.g. the lowering of the voting age to eighteen is now almost general throughout the Western world).

Nor is this movement confined to liberal society. Contemporary totalitarian societies may restrict individual freedom, but they hold just as strongly to the principle of liberty as self-creation. And they have been even more determined agents of individual mobility, breaking individuals loose from their identification with primary groups and making them relate exclusively to the larger society. They too aim to create a society in which all men are equally master of their fate, interchangeable before a free choice in an expanding field of potentialities, even though they see this choice as necessarily a common, collective act rather than a set of individual options.

Of course, Hegel did not foresee this immense homogenization, precisely because he thought that it would be contained by the new *Sittlichkeit* founded on the Idea. But he identified the forces which

pushed in that direction. He also held, as we saw above, that this process would be immensely destructive, that homogenization in destroying all differentiation would undermine all possible bases of *Sittlichkeit*, would reduce society from an articulated unity to an undifferentiated 'heap' which could only be held together by despotic force. This is one of the reasons why he thought that this process would never be able to get as far as it has, since it would have to destroy its own social foundation.

On this latter point, Hegel may be right; we may yet destroy ourselves. I gave some arguments above to indicate why I think that Hegel is not altogether wrong about the need for differentiation in a modern society. But the question is still open whether differentiation is possible in a society which has undergone homogenization to the degree that ours have. Perhaps other kinds of viable communities can arise to replace those which modern development has swept away.

But what seems clear is first that this process of homogenization has swept away traditional bases of identification, traditional modes of *Sittlichkeit*; and secondly that the resultant vacuum has been largely filled by national identifications which are frequently divisive and destructive.

It remains true, thirdly, that the ideologies which have presided over this homogenization, both liberal and revolutionary, have themselves developed within their own forms of *Sittlichkeit*. The revolutionary identity is now entrenched in the institutions and practice of the ruling vanguard party. There are versions of the liberal identity which are entrenched in the institutions, political and economic, of Western society. One could cite, for example, the producers' identity adumbrated above; or else the *sittlich* identification we find in certain countries with their representative institutions.

The worrying thing is that these modes of *Sittlichkeit* seem to be breaking down or at least undergoing extreme strain through all the industrialized world. Can any of them provide for a post-industrial state? What is the underlying conception of man and society which can provide a pole of identification for us? Are any of the modes which sprang from the liberal or revolutionary traditions adequate to the task?

Hegel's philosophy provides a valuable starting point if we want to ask questions of this range. For it not only has the theoretical language, but also has identified some of the forces at work. And it has this richness because it is an attempt to find a rational fulfilment to the twin aspirations which we identified as those of Hegel's

age, to rational autonomy and expressive unity. The need for expressive unity emerges in Hegel's thought in his understanding of the importance of *Sittlichkeit*; the need for rational autonomy comes out in the demand for a modern *Sittlichkeit* which will give full scope to the rational will of the modern individual.

In spite of the inadequacy of his own synthesis Hegel has a lot to say to our age. For a thought which tries to remain true to *both* these aspirations speaks directly to our context, which cannot afford any longer to suppress the question of *Sittlichkeit* altogether, as does the mainstream of modern political science, and yet must defend itself against the irresponsible dreams which our impending crisis breeds. Hegel's philosophy provides useful insights for an age that must avoid both the illusions and distortions of the utilitarian, atomistic tradition and the Romantic counter-illusions that these continually generate.

3

THE ISSUE OF FREEDOM

I. THE END OF HEGELIANISM

In the last sections I have been trying to illustrate the dual claim that while Hegel's ontology is near incredible his philosophy is very relevant to our age. I have tried to show this by examining Hegel's political philosophy in relation to some of today's basic issues.

Now in this third chapter I should like to examine a little more closely how this came about. What developments of modern civilization have tended to make Hegel's synthesis implausible? And how at the same time have the questions he asked and the way he asked them remained relevant? In trying to answer these questions we shall be looking at some of the transformations undergone by the central aspiration of Hegel's time, to combine radical autonomy and expressive fulfilment. And this will naturally lead us to a major issue about the nature of freedom.

Now the first question – why is Hegel's synthesis implausible today? – may seem easy to answer. We might think that the development of the modern industrial, technological, rationalized society which we referred to in 2.1, entrenching as it did the Enlightenment definition of man, has put paid to any and all expressivist visions of man in communion with nature, and nature as expression of Spirit, which the Romantic era spawned. Hegel's vision, albeit more rational in form and penetrating in insight, has gone under with the rest.

Seen from this angle, Romanticism might appear as a crisis which occurred at the birth of modern industrial society, which parallels the deep social unrest of the transition and influences and is influenced by it. The crisis, like the social unrest, was overcome as the new society became established. Romanticism was absorbed by being encapsulated in private life, and thus allocated its place in the new society. Parallel to this social absorption was an intellectual one. The scientific outlook of the second half of the nineteenth century incorporated many of the insights of expressivist and Romantic

thought, while setting aside the philosophical categories in which they had originally been couched.

Organic conceptions influenced a biology which once more became mechanistic in orientation. They underlie also the sociology of Comte, who nevertheless purges the categories of expression and final cause from science. Developmental conceptions become a central part of the canon of orthodox science with Darwin. And Freud himself pointed out how some of his key notions were anticipated by Romantic writers.

In a sense, therefore, the civilization which developed in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century tended to entrench the Enlightenment conception of man, in its progressive transformation of nature, in its collective structures and in its most prestigious intellectual achievement, science. And this must partly explain why Hegel's synthesis falls into eclipse around the half-century. For it attempted to integrate the expressivist current in more than a subordinate way. The structure of the Hegelian state was to be understood and valued for what it expressed or embodied, the Idea, not for its consequences or achievements. The rationality of the Hegelian state was something quite other than the rationalization of bureaucratic structures. The modern mixture of private Romanticism and public utilitarianism is rather civil society run wild, a society which has become a 'heap'. The continuous transformation of industrial society under the dynamic of productive efficiency and the search for a higher individual standard of life has eroded the differentiations which were essential to Hegel's state, and prized the individual more and more loose from any partial grouping. It was in underestimating this dynamic that Hegel was most seriously wrong in his characterization of the coming age.

But this error, if that is the word, is directly concerned with his ontology. Hegel thought that the forces of dissolution and homogenization of civil society would be contained because men would come to recognize themselves in the structures which embodied the Idea. Men would recover a new *Sittlichkeit* and identify with a larger life. The continued progress of these forces could only mean the progressive attenuation of this vision which must become ever more unreal and improbable as the new society grows. If Hegel had been right, then men would have recognized themselves in the structures of the rational state, and industrial society would not have taken the path it has.

Parallel to the development of modern society which breaks the bounds of Hegel's state is a development of modern science.

Empirical sciences were meant to be contained within the 'absolute science'. That is, the results of the empirical sciences should reveal the structure of the Concept, with the degree of approximation and inexactness appropriate to the level of reality concerned. But the sciences had already in his own day broken the bounds of the synthesis which Hegel's commentary imposed on them, and although the possibility always remains theoretically of recommencing a synthesizing commentary with each new important discovery, the development of the sciences has made the whole project of a philosophy of nature seem futile and misguided. The search for an underlying meaningful structure must seem arbitrary in an ever expanding and diversifying field of scientific knowledge.

Can we conclude then that Hegel's ontology is no longer a live option because modern civilization has made us all over into self-defining subjects with an objectifying stance towards nature and social life? Not quite. This explanation is too simple because in fact we have not been fully made over. There remains since the Romantic period a malaise around the modern identity. Certainly many of our contemporaries think of themselves primarily as individuals with certain *de facto* desires and goals; and of their society as a common enterprise of production, exchange and, ideally, mutual help, designed to fulfil their respective desires; so that the important virtues of society are rational organization, distributive justice and the safeguarding of individual independence.

But at the same time many – and often the same people – are moved by a sense of the profound inadequacy of modern society which has its roots in the Romantic protest. Since the end of the eighteenth century there has been a continuing stream of complaint against modern civilization as philistine, productive of mediocrity and conformity, timidly egoistical; as stifling originality, free expression, all the heroic virtues; as dedicated to a 'pitiable comfort' (*erbärmliches Behagen*).[1] Reproaches, or at least forebodings, of this order have come from the best and most sensitive minds, and across a broad spectrum, from very moderate and constructive critics like de Tocqueville and J. S. Mill to the wildest outsiders like Nietzsche and Sorel, not to speak of the host of writers and artists who took a stance in opposition to 'bourgeois' civilization.

In different ways these critics castigate modern society as expressively dead, as stifling expressive fulfilment through the power of conformity, or through the all-pervasive demands of utility, of producing a world in which all acts, objects, institutions

[1] F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Zarathustra's preface, §3.

have a use but none express what men are or could be. This stream of opposition has its source in the expressivist current of the late eighteenth century, and its continued force reflects the degree to which the modern identity has not become securely established.

We might be tempted to think that this current touches only a minority of intellectuals and artists, leaving the majority of 'ordinary' men unaffected. But the wide resonance of this kind of critique has been shown if nothing else in periodic outbursts or unrest which have troubled industrial civilization. Deep expressivist dissatisfaction contributed to the success of Fascism, and underlies the revolt of many young people against the 'system' in contemporary Western countries.

Thus we cannot simply explain the eclipse of Hegel's ontology by the triumphant establishment of a modern identity which has relegated the Romantic protest to the past. Nothing of the kind has occurred. Rather the question is why the continued flourishing Romantic or expressivist protest can no longer find philosophical expression in Hegel's vision.

Part of the answer lies in the fact that it is a *protest.* Hegel's vision was of a world reconciled to the Spirit, but the Romantic spirit is conscious of being in opposition to modern society. It is a nostalgia for the past, the yearning for an as yet unfulfilled hope, or the determination to realize an unprecedented future, but certainly not the perception of the rationality of the real. And if men who longed for expressive fulfilment felt alienated from the course of modern history in the late nineteenth century, how much greater cause have their successors to feel this today. Prior to 1914, the philistine society at least offered the solidity of a firmly established order destined to realize more and more fully its own limited, pitiable and unheroic form of good. But the upheavals since that time have called even this into question without setting Western civilization on a higher road of expressive fulfilment. The earnest search for 'a pitiable comfort' has been interrupted more by orgies of grotesque inhumanity than by departures towards a new and higher culture. And by a cruel irony, the Romantic protest itself has had its share of responsibility in these gruesome interludes. Various of its themes have been twisted to the service of Fascism, Stalinism, not to speak of the freelance practitioners of indiscriminate assassination of our day.

So that a contemporary is easily tempted to see history as a 'slaughter bench. . . on to which the fortune of peoples, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals have been brought to sacrifice'

(*VG*, 80). What he may find hard to understand is how Hegel after writing this line could nevertheless still see history as the realization of reason and freedom. What separates us from that age is the sense men had that the horrors and nightmares of history, the furies of destruction and cruelty which remain enigmatic to agent and victim, were behind us. This sense, which Hegel expressed in his philosophy – although he seems to have wavered at times in his private judgement – is just about unrecoverable even by the most optimistic of our contemporaries.

So that, whether as a member of a confident, growing modern society, or as a witness of this society's disintegration, the heir of the Romantics cannot but sense alienation. He cannot see history as the unfolding of Spirit. And at the same time he can no longer see nature as the emanation of Spirit. The growing control over nature of modern technology, as well as the ever expanding frontier of science, has dispelled that vision of the world as the manifestation of spiritual powers or a divine principle which was the culmination of the expressivist current of the late eighteenth century. That expressive pantheism, the 'Spinozism' of the *Sturm und Drang*, which tempted Lessing, all but conquered Herder and was the common property of Goethe and the Romantics, ceases to be a live option as modern civilization entrenches itself. But Hegel's synthesis was built on this. Its aim, as I have tried to interpret it, was to combine this vision of nature as the expression of Spirit both with the implied call to man to recover expressive unity with it, and with the aspiration to rational autonomy. Spirit, the ontological foundation of the world in rational necessity, is meant to realize this synthesis. It guarantees that man can give himself to unity with the whole without losing his rational freedom. But if this vision of expressive pantheism wanes, if the aspiration to unity with the 'all of nature'[1] ceases to be meaningful, then the very basis disappears for the absolute idea, along with Goethe's *Urphänomene*, Novalis' 'magical idealism' and the wilder creations of the Romantics.

Thus Hegel's synthesis cannot command adherents today, not only because it is built in part on the expressivist reaction to the modern identity which contemporary civilization has tended to entrench more and more, but because it is built on an earlier and outmoded form of this reaction. It belongs to the opposition while claiming to give us a vision of reason triumphant; and it belongs moreover to a stage of this opposition which no longer appears viable.

[1] F. Hölderlin, *Hyperion* (Fischer edn, Frankfurt, 1962), p. 9.

2. THE FOCUS ON MAN

Thus we can see, in rough outline at least, why Hegel's central thesis is dead. But why is it that this philosophy remains highly relevant? This will become clearer if we look at the forms of Romantic and expressivist opposition which have succeeded those of Hegel's time.

If the goal of a return to unity with the great current of life is no longer plausible, even combined with the spiral vision of history where the restored unity incorporates subjective freedom; if the historical experience of objectifying and transforming nature in theory and practice is too powerful for it to survive as an interlocutor; then the expressivist current of opposition to modern civilization has to focus on man. That which is 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' by modern society, hemmed in by modern conformity, stamped out by the great machine of Utility, repressed by the 'system', is human nature, or rather the creative, expressive potential of man.

But expressive fulfilment entails a certain integrity, a wholeness of life, which does not admit of division between body and soul, will and inclination, Spirit and nature. If this fulfilment no longer means communion with nature as an embodiment of Spirit, nature must still figure in it in some fashion.

Later forms of expressivism show this in two ways. First, the realized form of life is seen as expressing our deeper motivation as natural beings which is checked, frustrated or hidden by an artificial, divisive or repressive society. Modern society is seen as the oppressor of the spontaneous, the natural, the sensuous or the 'Dionysiac' in man. In a sense, much of post-Romantic nationalism can be put in this broad category since it seeks to restore particular facts about men – their heredity, the land they live in, the language group they belong to – as centrally relevant motivations in a fulfilled human life, against 'abstract', 'cosmopolitan' ideals of man.

Or second, man is seen as achieving harmony with nature by transforming it. Philosophy, the contemplation of the Idea in nature and history, as a 'cult' which restores our unity to the whole, can have no meaning for those who have lost the sense of the divine in nature, and must seem obscene to those who are in revolt against an inert, oppressive, inhuman society. From within this horizon, the aspiration to expressive unity between man and the natural and social world on which he depends can only be fulfilled by his freely reshaping nature and society. In this kind of vision expressive unity is combined, as in Hegel's philosophy, with a radical notion

of freedom, but in a fundamentally different way. Hegel's synthesis has been, as it were anthropologized – transferred from *Geist* on to man.

This was, of course, the revolutionary transposition which was carried out by the Young Hegelians of the 1830s and 1840s. And it has been of considerable consequence. For the great expressivist protests against the course of modern civilization have incorporated this notion of willed transformation of nature, both human and external, as an essential part of man's fulfilment. Reactions to the expressive poverty of modern civilization have, of course, varied widely: *Weltschmerz*, a deep sense of the world as abandoned and expressively dead; or a nostalgia for an earlier, unrecoverable age; or an attempt to return to one such earlier time – the age of faith, or the primitive condition of balance with nature which many of today's 'drop-outs' yearn for – or again, the attempt to create a secondary world of art untrammelled by the workaday one. But politically oriented protests have generally envisaged an active reshaping of human life and its natural basis. This has been true not only of the ideologies of the Left, like Marxism and anarchism, but also of those like Fascism which stressed as well the release of pent-up 'elemental' forces in man. Fascism in fact tried in a confused way to combine the above 'Dionysiac' alternative with this 'Promethean' one.

Because of the importance of this Promethean aspiration, it is worth looking at its most influential formulation, in the theory of the man who was also the greatest of the Young Hegelians.

Many Marxists, and others, would object to an interpretation of Marxism which places it in what I have called the expressivist tradition. Of course, Marxism is more than this. But I do not think we can understand it and its impact if we try to abstract it from this dimension.

Certainly few would want to deny that the young Marx is the heir, through Hegel, of the expressivist aspiration. And already in the early 1840s this is married with the thrust of the radical Enlightenment to produce the peculiarly powerful Marxist synthesis.

The young Marx is heir of the radical Enlightenment first in his notion that man comes to shape nature and eventually society to his purposes. He is its heir secondly in his critique of the inhumanity of the present order. The Enlightenment gave rise to a new kind of indignant protest against the injustices of the world. Having demolished the older visions of cosmic order and exposed them as at best illusion, and perhaps even sham, it left all the differentiations

of the old society, all its special burdens and disciplines, without justification. It is one thing to bear one's lot as a peasant if it is one's appointed place in the hierarchy of things as ordered by God and nature. But if the very idea of society as the embodiment of such a cosmic order is swept aside, if society is rather the common instrument of men who must live under the same political roof to pursue happiness, then the burdens and deprivations of this station are a savage imposition, against reason and justice, maintained only by knavery and lies. They would cry to heaven – if heaven still existed – for redress and even vengeance. The Enlightenment thus provoked a new consciousness of inhumanity, of gratuitous and unnecessary suffering, and an urgent determination to combat it. For if man is only a subject of desires who aims at their fulfilment (i.e. happiness), then nothing in heaven or earth compensates for the loss of this happiness. Unrequited deprivation is unconsolable, absolute loss.

Marx takes up this radical critique of inhumanity. But the principal justifying myth which he denounces as the alibi for exploitation and oppression is not the old religion but the new atomistic, utilitarian Enlightenment philosophy itself, principally as reflected in the theories of the classical economists. Indeed, orthodox religion comes off rather lightly in comparison. For it is 'the sentiment of a heartless world',[1] the flowers on man's chains, an almost indispensable consolation for men's suffering in an unjust world – an injustice which in the present phase of history is directly propped up by the bourgeois philosophy of utility.

But the tremendous power of Marx's theory comes from his joining this thrust of the radical Enlightenment to the expressivist tradition. In the theory as we have it in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, which remained unpublished in Marx's lifetime, the transformation of nature is also a self-transformation. Man in making over his natural environment is reshaping his own 'inorganic body'. He suffers alienation because at first under class society his work and its product, transformed nature – which properly belong to him in the strong sense that they are part of him, his expression – escape from him and become an alien reality, with a dynamic of their own which resists and opposes him. This notion of alienation thus belongs intrinsically to an expressivist structure of thought. Man's work and its product, the man-made environment, is his expression, and hence its loss is not just deprivation, but self-diremption; and its recovery is not just the means to happiness but

[1] Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore (London and New York, 1964), pp. 43–4.

regaining wholeness and freedom. For man's production is his 'self-creation' (*Selbsterzeugung*).

Hence in his own way Marx takes up a common theme of virtually all expressivist critics of modern civilization, and denounces a society which makes possession the central human goal at the expense of expression. The drive for possession itself belongs to the alienated world where man's human powers are so detached from him that they can be transferred and circulate as property, a poor, distorted substitute for genuine recovery. 'Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital, or when it is. . . utilized in some way.'[1]

This potent combination of the radical Enlightenment and expressivism comes from a transposition of Hegel's synthesis from *Geist* on to man. In Hegel's point of origin, as it were, the Idea goes out into nature and at first is lost there. That is, it has not yet an adequate expression, and hence there is division and separation within this world, and between the world and Spirit which cannot recognize itself. The development of an adequate embodiment, and hence the return of Spirit to itself is the work of history.

Now for *Geist* read man, not man as an individual, but as a 'generic essence' (*Gattungswesen*). At his point of origin man is a natural being, for Marx. He exists in nature and only continues through a constant process of interchange with nature. At first this natural matrix in which he is set does not express him at all. But because man unlike the beast can produce universally and consciously, this interchange with nature does not just renew the cycle but transforms it as well. Man makes over nature into an expression of himself, and in the process properly becomes man. Marx speaks of this self-creation of man through the fashioning of an adequate external expression as the 'objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] of man's species life'.[2]

But the first attempts at man-made world, carried out under the pressure of need, introduce division. Men can only achieve a higher type of interchange with nature, or mode of production, by reordering their social relations, and in the conditions of backwardness and indigence which prevail at the beginning, this means that some men must take command over and hence exploit others. By a cruel irony, the first step towards a higher life, the true realization of man, takes men out of the paradise of primitive communism to the pain and cruelty of class society. We are forcefully reminded of Hegel's interpretation of the myth of the Fall. It is precisely man's primitive

[1] Ibid. p. 159. [2] Ibid. p. 128.

affirmation of himself as a subject, or spiritual being, which in the early condition of raw particularity cuts him off from the universal, and starts him on the long process of formation which will eventually make of him an adequate vehicle of Spirit.

But divided men cannot achieve an adequate expression, because the subject of the transformation is not the individual but the 'species being', human society set in the matrix of nature. Hence under class society men are not in control of their own expression. It escapes them and takes on a dynamic of its own. They suffer alienation in their lives. And this is matched by an alienated consciousness in which they take this estranged world seriously as the iron laws of classical economics in the bourgeois epoch. Just like Hegel's Spirit in the period of unhappy consciousness, generic man does not recognize himself in his own objectification.

But if class division is ultimately forced by indigence, then once men have achieved sufficient mastery over nature, this division can be overcome. Generic man will return to himself in his own embodiment, will enter a realm of freedom, that is, integral expression, one which will belong indivisibly to the whole society, in which man will be reconciled with man. Communism will be the abolition 'of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man to himself as a social, i.e., really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development.'[1]

As an expressive fulfilment, communism will overcome the divisions and oppositions to which human life and thought have been prey.

> Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is *definitive* resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.[1]

In this list we see the Hegelian ambition attained in transposed form, the reconciliation of oppositions; and in particular the opposition between man's necessary objectification in nature, with which he must be in harmony, and the demands of his freedom which at first pit him in opposition against nature. Marx, too, in his own way unites expressivism to Fichte's radical freedom. For Marx's man creates himself. But in Hegel the reconciliation is achieved by a

[1] Ibid. p. 155.

recognition of the embodiment of Spirit which is in large part already there. This recognition requires a transformation in the life form of man who is Spirit's vehicle in history, to be sure; but since the ultimate goal of this transformation is Spirit's self-recognition, even the transformed society reposes on a recognition: it requires that men see a larger order and identify with the differentiated structure of society as the reflection of this order.

For Marx on the other hand there is no recognition. The reconciliation is entirely created. Man is one with nature because and to the extent to which he has made it over as his expression. The transformation of human society is not aimed at an eventual recognition of a larger order but ultimately at the subjugation of nature to a design freely created by man.

The well-known shorthand formula differentiating the two thinkers, that Hegel speaks of contemplating the real while Marx wants to change it, is grounded ultimately in their different ontologies. Since for Hegel the subject is *Geist*, the Spirit of all, reconciliation must come through recognition, since a transformation of the whole universe is without sense. Marx's reconciliation on the other hand must come through transformation, because his subject is generic man; and man, unlike God, cannot recognize himself in nature until he has put himself there through work. Marx's reconciliation will, of course, always be incomplete; it never extends beyond the (always receding) frontier of untransformed nature. But this is the price of his Promethean notion of self-creation.

Once one has made this transposition from *Geist* to man, then Hegel's whole differentiated structure must appear just like those of the *ancien régime*, as oppression and injustice masquerading as divine order. Hence Marx while acknowledging his debt to Hegel naturally released all the indignation of the radical Enlightenment at his conception of the state. The Hegelian synthesis is denounced as one achieved in thought only, masking the effective diremption of the real. In the polemic Marx inevitably distorted Hegel, speaking at times as though he was somehow concerned with 'abstract thought' alone, and was not also the protagonist of another kind of praxis. But the debt is undeniable and comes through Marx's text even when he is not engaged in acknowledging it. In order to reconcile radical freedom and nature, Hegel developed his notion that radical freedom, as Spirit, was at the foundation of everything. At base everything is an emanation of freedom. It only remained to transpose this immensely activist conception on to man to generate the most powerful revolutionary doctrine.

Many commentators who would agree with this interpretation of early Marx hold that his mature thought was quite different, and that he jettisoned the Hegelian and expressivist formulations of the early 1840s in favour of a hard-nosed science of capitalist society which expounds the iron laws of its inner development and eventual demise. I think it is true that Marx did look on *Capital* as a work of science, and that the term 'science' came to have for him very much the sense that it had for the later nineteenth century in general. So that we might look at *Capital* as one of those great works of mature science, like Darwin's evolution theory or later Freud's psychoanalysis, which incorporate the insights of the earlier Romantic period. But it does not follow that Marx believed he should therefore take back anything of the position he held in 1844–7. The position I outlined above is drawn from the Paris Manuscripts of 1844, complemented with a few details from the *Manifesto*. I see no evidence at all that Marx went back on this position in any essential respect, or felt that he needed to.

The conflict between the 'scientific' stance of mature Marx and his expressivist transposition of Hegel is in the mind of later commentators, and in this they are probably more clairvoyant than Marx. But it is an unjustified projection to attribute this sense of incompatibility to Marx himself. The fact is that from the beginning, his position was a synthesis between the radical Enlightenment, which sees man as capable of objectifying nature and society in science in order to master it, and the expressivist aspiration to wholeness. This is what he meant in speaking of communism as the union of humanism and naturalism. Expressive fulfilment comes when man (generic man) dominates nature and can impress his free design on it. But at the same time he dominates nature by objectifying it in scientific practice. Under communism men freely shape and alter whatever social arrangements exist. They treat them as instruments. But at the same time this collective shaping of their social existence is their self-expression. In this vision, objectification of nature and expression through it are not incompatible, any more than they are for a sculptor who may make use of engineering technology in constructing his work.

In other words because expressive fulfilment came with the radical freedom to shape nature, it could be combined with the most far-reaching Enlightenment aspiration to dominate the natural and social world through science and technology.

What we see from the young to the mature Marx is not a change of view but a shift of emphasis within what to him must always have

appeared as fundamentally the same position. In the climate of the late nineteenth century it was naturally the dimension of 'scientific socialism' which tended to predominate. And this orientation was finally sealed by the success of a Marxist revolutionary party in a backward country. For Marxism had to take on the role of a modernizing ideology. Socialism equals soviet power plus electrification, in Lenin's famous phrase. Both these goals required that the ruling elite adopt the stance of engineers relative to the at best inert, often refractory social matter they had to deal with. Marxist Leninism began to be treated as a blueprint in the hands of master builders rather than the consciousness of a new age of freedom.

But official Marxism never simply rejected the expressivist elements of the synthesis. The vision of freedom and of the wholeness of communist man in the official Marxist movement remains in the expressivist tradition, as does much of its critique of bourgeois society. Indeed, the pretence of wholeness is what underlies the totalitarian tendencies of Soviet Marxism, e.g. the demands it makes on art and cultural life, a bureaucratic degeneration of the original claims made on behalf of communist man.

But the Soviet experience has just served to underline the weakness of Marx's synthesis between expressive fulfilment and scientific objectification. The example of the sculptor certainly shows that man can have both an expressive and an objectifying relation to nature at once. And we can imagine a harmonious group shaping and reshaping its social arrangements in order to meet standards of both efficiency and expression at the same time. But in these cases what men are relying on is an engineering technology or a technique of distributing tasks or something of the sort. They are not using a science of man in society which identifies the determinants of people's behaviour. For if this is being used then some men are controlling or manipulating others.

In other words a scientific objectification of man which identifies factors determining how men act and feel which are beyond the ken of most and/or the will of all cannot really be the basis of the praxis of a communist society. This is not to say that a science of this kind must be used to ill purpose, or against the cause of freedom. On the contrary, psycho-analysis which claims to be an objectification of this kind can be used by some men to cure others, and arguably increase their freedom. But the Marxist notion of communist society is that of men deciding together; the decisions represent in a sense a general will, not a concatenation of individual decisions but a genuine common purpose. This does not exclude the

marginal use of technologies of human control, say for the purpose of curing the sick. But the course which the society takes, as a conscious collective decision, cannot be an outcome whose determinants are encompassed by an applied science of this kind.

Now if *Capital*, or the corpus of Marxist Leninism, gives us the 'laws' governing bourgeois society, and therefore tells us how best to go about abolishing it, the transcending of this society must also mean the suspension of these laws. For the science of bourgeois society shows how men are caught up in structures and a dynamic which they neither understand nor control. This science cannot remain the basis of the revolutionary praxis which supersedes bourgeois society or else this praxis will remain manipulative in contradiction to its central justification.

Thus at the revolutionary border between two eras there must be a jump, as it were a shift in the laws which apply to society. And this is, indeed, provided for in the theory of alienation described above. The practices of bourgeois society which under alienation follow a dynamic of their own, which Marxist science will trace, are brought back into human control with communism, not to fall under similar external determinants but rather to be genuinely up for decision in a free society.

This transcending of external determinants in favour of free expression makes perfect sense, of course, in the categories of Hegelian philosophy. It is what we see when we ascend the levels of being in Hegel's philosophy of nature, for example from inorganic nature to life, or when we move from alienation back to *Sittlichkeit*. But it is foreign to the established tradition of science rooted in the Enlightenment. This can allow for man objectifying nature as a domain of neutral instruments on one level while he shapes an expressive object on the other. But it cannot admit of a shifting boundary whereby what is in the realm of objectification and natural law at one stage of history is pulled beyond it into the realm of expression at another. It makes no allowance for its laws being *aufgehoben*.

In epistemological terms, this is the ambiguity which the mature Marx never cleared up and probably never saw. This *Aufhebung* of the laws of society which occurs at critical turning points in history, so that the very terms necessary to explain one period are not applicable at another, was certainly implicit in the original theory of the young Marx, as it had been in Hegel. It remained essential to the logic of Marx's notion of revolution and the transition to communism. But it was not part of the model of science which

Marx seemed to be appealing to in launching *Capital* on the world.

Marx never ironed out this wrinkle. No doubt if it had been pointed out to him it would have seemed impossibly precious and 'philosophical'. His scientific work was cut out by the urgent practical needs of bringing the revolution against capitalism to term. Speculation on the transition to communism was a luxury barely to be indulged in, much less on the epistemological problems raised by the existence of such a transition.

But if one probes deeper, it seems that the problem never arose for Marx because he had an extremely simple-minded view of the transition. The revolution would abolish bourgeois society and hence the laws of its operation, and a united class of proletarians would take over and dispose freely of the economy which it inherited. This kind of leap into untrammelled freedom is not really a dialectical *Aufhebung*, where the unity of the higher stage is always foreshadowed in the lower, and there is continuity as well as discontinuity between them. But nor is it very realistic. Marx seemed to have been oblivious to the inescapable opacity and indirectness of communication and decision in large bodies of men, the way in which the dynamic of their interaction always partly escapes men, even in small and simple societies, let alone those organized around a large and complex productive system.

The image of the leap, as much as the pressure of more urgent problems, dispensed Marx from having to think about the organization of freedom. It prevented him from seeing communism as a social predicament with its own characteristic limits, less confining and inhuman than those of capitalist society, but limits nonetheless. And thus the problem of the relation of these limits to those of capitalist society could not arise. Rather it is as though the laws of bourgeois society fall away with the abolition of this society the way the technology of carburettors would fall into irrelevance if we got rid of the internal combustion engine.

A shift of this kind can be understood by the most hard-boiled positivist, and it is some such conception which makes it appear that the *Aufhebung* of bourgeois society towards which *Capital* points can fit within the classical framework of science. But this compatibility with mainstream science is purchased by a wildly unrealistic notion of the transition as a leap into untrammelled freedom, which simply sets aside the old restraints.

The Marxian synthesis between Enlightenment science and expressive fulfilment is in the end not viable. To set out what is involved in a dialectical transition, to portray the relation between

the 'laws' of society at one phase and those at a later phase, to give the social articulation of increased freedom, this would take us well beyond the confines of Enlightenment science. We would have to map the transition from a stage in which men's actions are governed by external laws, that is, follow regularities which are not desired or adequately conceived by anyone, to a stage in which they are limited by a situation which they (partially) understand and which orients their choices. But this kind of transition takes us beyond the boundaries of classical science. The step from a determination through external law to direction by a meaningful situation can be more readily accounted for in the categories of Hegel's dialectical transitions.

On the other hand, to make the transition comprehensible to mainstream science we have to think of it not as a step from blind law to meaningful situation, but as simple sloughing off of restraints. We leave the nature of the subject and his agency in the new social form as an unexplored point of complete spontaneity.

Later commentators have been right to point out the rift between Marx's expressivism and his scientism. But this is not a difference between the young and the mature Marx. Rather his inability to see this rift was already implicit in his original position, in the transposition on to man of Hegel's notion of a self-positing *Geist*. The powers of a Spirit who creates his own embodiment, once attributed to man, yield a conception of freedom as self-creation more radical than any previous one. It opens the heady perspective, once alienation is overcome, of a leap to a free self-activity of generic man limited only by the (ever receding) refractory bounds of unsubdued nature. The Marxian notion of the realm of freedom keeps us from exploring the area in which this rift appears.

But this was not a blind spot peculiar to Marx. It affects the whole communist movement. Just a few months before October 1917, in his *State and Revolution*, Lenin still expressed an incredibly simple view about the administration of communist society. The Bolshevik Party was thrown into the real history of state power with this simple image of human freedom as the unproblematic administration of things. And Soviet communist society has remained somehow fixated on it, so that it continues to resist the framing of any adequate conception of itself as a social form, even while it comes to 'administer' men as things on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

The terrible history of Soviet communism has induced independent Marxists to rethink the theory, and this has led many to re-examine

the more 'philosophical' works of the 1840s. The early Marx has offered a new point of departure for many 'revisionists', while these first writings are frowned on by official Communism as immature attempts, not yet entirely freed from Hegelian philosophy. This is not to say that official Marxism has sought to jettison the expressivist elements of the doctrine. Rather they have fought to keep Marx's unviable synthesis between expressivism and scientism from coming under close scrutiny. The appeal of Bolshevism is made up of the impossible combination of a promise of expressive freedom on one hand and the possession of 'scientific socialism' as an engineering blueprint for history on the other. It is in the interest of the movement to keep this contradiction from being exposed and resolved. When it is resolved, as in the work of Louis Althusser, who has tried to purge Marx of Hegelian notions in the name of a sophisticated form of scientism, the result is neither convincing as exegesis nor attractive as a political vision. The justification of elite rule by the Leninist party, in a supposed scientific objectification of the contradictions of society, does not suffer explicit statement without producing a malaise in the reader who has reflected on contemporary history.

The Bolshevik image of the proletarian party as 'engineers' building in conformity with the 'laws' of history combines two opposed pictures of the human predicament. It shows us man, on one hand, imposing his will on the course of history, even against odds and refractory matter. This is the 'heroic' image. On the other hand dialectical materialism sets out the laws which govern man and history with an iron necessity. These two pictures are not as such incompatible. But they cannot be combined in the way proposed. The laws which are applied by the engineers who impose their will on events cannot be those which hold with an iron necessity, if we mean by this that we can account for what happens by reference to them without invoking any human decisions, themselves not explained by them. A true law of development of history would be one whose antecedents are not manipulable. It could serve us to adjust more harmoniously to the course of events, to smooth transitions, but not to impose our will. It would not be amenable to application by 'engineers'.

The Bolsheviks in fact imposed their will on events, not only in undertaking the Revolution in 1917, but much more in the drive to collectivize the peasantry after 1928. How much this was against the grain can be measured by the blood spilt, and by the state of Soviet agriculture almost half a century later. And it would seem

that Stalin and his colleagues felt pushed by necessity: that either they brought the peasants to heel or the growth of the relatively free peasant economy under NEP would undermine the basis of their power. It was that kind of 'iron necessity', a matter of us or them, which indeed had something to do with the economic infrastructure of power, but nothing whatever to do with an inevitable direction of history. On the contrary, it was nip and tuck. The 'laws of history', which point to the inevitable triumph of communism, serve in the end as an alibi for a decision imposed on events. There can be regret but no remorse for blood spilt in the inescapable forward march of humanity to a higher civilization.

Marxist Leninism has thus realized a marriage of incompatibles, a union first of an extreme voluntarism and scientism – the notion that the science of history objectifies society, as physics does nature, as a domain of potential manipulanda – combined then with the most thoroughgoing determinism. The first two are a natural combination for an elite which is imposing a new direction on a refractory mass. But this practice cannot easily be squared with the Marxist perspective of expressive freedom. And so this massive social engineering is presented as the outcome of the laws of history, emerging from the masses as their inescapable will and destiny. There are colossal contradictions in this position: the laws of history cannot be the basis of social engineering *and* reveal the inevitable trend of events; the mixture of voluntarism and engineering allows no place for the growth of freedom. But the combination has been immensely powerful as a political rallying point in contemporary history.

Marxist revisionists have seen the links between these three terms. They have seen that the image of the revolution as imposed by will and the conception of it as determined by iron necessity paradoxically go together. They have tried to break from both these at once in a new reading of Marxism, by which we can trace the ripening of the conditions of revolution, which nevertheless 'can be translated into reality only through men's decisions between alternatives'.[1] The rediscovery, with the help of Marx's early vision, of the bent in things towards a revolutionary transformation is the guarantee against impotent preaching, a pure politics of *Sollen*, on one hand, as well as against the attempt to impose communism by force on the other. It is the guarantee that the liberation will be the work of the spontaneous activity of large masses of people and not

[1] Georg Lukács, as quoted in Istvan Meszaros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic* (London: Meszaros Press, 1972), p. 44.

just of a revolutionary elite, that the means used to achieve communism will be in conformity with the end.

At the same time, this bent in things is not an iron necessity, so that the paradox is avoided of a transition to freedom which is not itself mediated by free activity.

The revisionist attempt to rediscover the bent in things which 'inclines without necessitating', to use Leibniz's phrase, is rightly directed back to the formulations of early Marx. But early Marx is not enough. For Marx himself, early and late, held to a terribly unreal notion of freedom in which the opacity, division, indirectness and cross-purposes of social life were quite overcome. It is this picture of situationless freedom which underlies the unviable synthesis of expressivism and scientism, and which allows Bolshevik voluntarism to masquerade as the realization of freedom. Whereas the bent of revisionism is to recover a notion of free action as in an oriented situation which the agent can either assume or refuse.

Now this freedom without situation is what Hegel called 'absolute freedom'. It was a conception of freedom which was sterile and empty in his eyes in that it left us with no reason to act in one way rather than another; and it was destructive, since in its emptiness it drives us to tear down any other positive work as a hindrance to freedom. As I said above in 2.7, Hegel's criticisms of absolute freedom, though aimed at the French Revolutionaries, were also in one sense criticisms of Marx by anticipation; but in another sense Marx as Hegel's heir in part escapes these strictures. We can now see more clearly how both these judgements are true, and how the early Marx is thus both a good and an insufficient source for the revisionist search for a definition of freedom in situation. Marx escapes Hegel's strictures because he does not start from the notion of a purely autonomous rational will, as Kant did. On the contrary man is in a cycle of interchange with nature: he does not gain freedom by abstracting from or neutralizing this nature, but by transforming it. And this sets him a very definite task; that of making nature over on one hand, and of overcoming the divisions and alienation which arise in the early stages of this transformation on the other. Man is thus in a situation; he is part of a larger order of things which sets him a task. In this way Marx's theory is like Hegel's, of which it is the transposition, as we have seen.

From the beginning man has to create the conditions of freedom. And this is what has given their direction to Marxist societies. They have to *build* socialism, develop the preconditions of communism. But once the conditions are realized, the Marxist notion of freedom

is of no further help. It is not a matter of providing a detailed blueprint for a free society, a demand which has often rightly been rejected as contradictory. Rather it is that the overcoming of all alienation and division leaves man without a situation, and at this stage, the end of 'pre-history', the Hegelian point about the emptiness of absolute freedom begins to apply.

If it is absurd to ask for a blueprint of communist society, it is not at all malapropos to ask in general terms how we envisage men's situation will have changed, what constraints, divisions, tensions, dilemmas, struggles and estrangements will replace those we know today. Not only does classical Marxism have no answer to this; it implies that the answer is 'none': that our only situation will be that of generic man, harmoniously united, in contest with nature. But this predicament is not only unbelievable, but arguably unlivable. It would be an utterly empty freedom.

This situationless notion of freedom has been very destructive, though not quite in the way Hegel predicted. For Marxist societies have been very concerned with *con*struction, building the foundations of socialism. But Marx's variant of 'absolute freedom' is at the base of Bolshevik voluntarism which, strong with the final justification of history, has crushed all obstacles in its path with extraordinary ruthlessness, and has spawned again that Terror which Hegel described with uncanny insight.

3. SITUATING FREEDOM

We have looked at Marx's Promethean expressivism, because this is the most influential formulation of a widespread modern protest against the course of our civilization. The idea of overcoming the injustice and expressive deadness of our world at one stroke by recovering control and radically reshaping it according to a freely chosen design exercises a profound attraction well beyond the boundaries of official Marxism. We find it almost everywhere among the protest and liberation movements of our day.

And in its very ubiquity, we have the beginnings of an answer to our question above about the relevance of Hegelian philosophy. To the extent that these aspirations to radical freedom are influenced by Marx, they descend also from Hegel. But what is much more important, they encounter the same dilemma which emerged from our discussion of Marxism. They face the same emptiness, the same temptation to the forceful imposition of their solution on an unyielding world, the same inability to define a human situation once

the present imperfect one is swept away. The rebels of May 1968 were in this respect no different from the calloused commissars they so despised. The difference was that the latter had a programme, based on the disciplined building of the 'conditions' of socialism, while the former insisted quite rightly that the building had gone on long enough and it was time to enter the realm of freedom.

But this whole tradition, whether Marxist, anarchist, situationist or whatever, offers no idea at all of what the society of freedom should look like beyond the empty formulae: that it should be endlessly creative; have no divisions, whether between men or within them, or between levels of existence (play is one with work, love is one with politics, art is one with life); involve no coercion, no representation etc. All that is done in these negative characterizations is to think away the entire human situation. Small wonder then that this freedom has no content.

In the heat of the struggle, behind the barricades, there is a real liberation of expression, a field for creative action, the breaking down of barriers, a real participatory democracy. But of course this arises in a very real *situation*, one of breach with the ongoing routines and structures, and of combat against the 'forces of order'. But in the image of the revolution triumphant, this situation too, along with all others, is thought away.

It is as though the rebels of May 1968 were sent by Providence out of a sense of irony to confront old revolutionaries with the logic of their position. This dilemma of absolute freedom is one that Hegel thought about, and that is one of the reasons why contemporaries will continually return to examine him. He is at the origin of an important modern cast of thought, whose basic dilemma he grasped more profoundly than most of his successors.

But this problem, which we have spoken of as that of relating freedom to a situation, affects more than the Marxist or even revolutionary tradition. It is a problem for all forms of modern expressivism, and in a sense also for the whole modern conception of subjectivity.

This modern notion of subjectivity has spawned a number of conceptions of freedom which see it as something men win through to by setting aside obstacles or breaking loose from external impediments, ties or entanglements. To be free is to be untrammelled, to depend in one's action only on oneself. Moreover this conception of freedom has not been a mere footnote, but one of the central ideas by which the modern notion of the subject has been defined, as is evident in the fact that freedom is one of the values most appealed to

in modern times. At the very outset, the new identity as self-defining subject was won by breaking free of the larger matrix of a cosmic order and its claim.

This type of conception of freedom defines it as self-dependence, to coin a general description. It contrasts with earlier (and some later) conceptions which define freedom in terms of order or right relation. For instance, the notion of freedom implicit in Aristotle relates it to harmony, equilibrium, the mean, as against the disordered hegemony of the extremes.

This is in a sense a negative conception of freedom. But it is not equivalent to 'negative freedom' as this is usually identified.[1] Negative freedom usually means freedom defined as independent from external interference, whereas 'positive' conceptions define it rather as realized in action which comes from or expresses the true self. But even positive conceptions in modern times have been notions of self-dependence. Freedom is won by breaking the hold of the lower self or nature so that I may obey only my (true) self. Thus Kant, whose theory is at the origin of many positive notions of freedom, defines freedom as obeying a law made by the rational self, in contrast to dependence on the will of others, external authority or nature.

This cast of thought, which sees freedom as self-dependence, has thus been a common basis underlying the revolutionary developments in the modern notion of freedom. It is common to the original 'negative' conception of classical liberalism from Locke to Bentham, to Rousseau's conception of freedom as obeying only oneself, to the Kantian notion of autonomy, and its successors right up to the Marxian idea of the realm of freedom, where man having overcome all alienation and dominated the natural matrix in which he is set once more determines his destiny out of himself – though the subject of this freedom is here generic, not individual, man.

But this basic idea has in fact undergone development. Its first empiricist or naturalistic versions saw the goals of the self as given by nature – as desires or drives. Later variants wanted to go beyond the given altogether. The watershed in this respect is perhaps Kant. As transposed by Hegel and again by Marx, the Kantian aspiration to radical autonomy turns into the idea that human nature is not simply a given, but is to be made over. To be integrally free man must reshape his own nature.

[1] Cf. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: University Press, 1969.

Now it is arguably this general conception itself, equating freedom and self-dependence, which generates the dilemma we examined above in connection with Marxism. For it is defined in such a way that complete freedom would mean the abolition of all situation, that is, a predicament which sets us a certain task or calls for a certain response from us if we are to be free. The only kind of situation which this view can recognize is one defined by the obstacles to untrammelled action which have to be conquered or set aside – external oppression, inauthentic aspirations imposed by society, alienation, natural limits. This kind of situation calls for 'liberation', a word which reappears today in every conceivable context. But liberation is understood as a process which results in freedom. On this view, there is no situation such that the response it calls for would *be* free action at its fullest extent as against just clearing the way to such action. Full freedom would be situationless.

And by the same token it would be empty. Complete freedom would be a void in which nothing would be worth doing, nothing would deserve to count for anything. The self which has arrived at freedom by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements is characterless, and hence without defined purpose, however much this is hidden by such seemingly positive terms as 'rationality' or 'creativity'. These are ultimately quite indeterminate as criteria for human action or mode of life. They cannot specify any content to our action outside of a situation which sets goals for us, which thus imparts a shape to rationality and provides an inspiration for creativity.

We might hope to fill this void by returning to the earlier variants of the modern conception of freedom as self-dependence in which our goals are supposedly given by nature. Freedom would then be the unchecked fulfilment of desire, and the shape of desire would be a given. But this is a very inadequate conception of freedom. For if free activity cannot be defined in opposition to our nature and situation, on pain of vacuity, it cannot simply be identified with following our strongest, or most persistent, or most all-embracing desire either. For that would make it impossible to say that our freedom was ever thwarted by our own compulsions, fears, obsessions, or to say that freedom widens with heightened awareness or awakened aspirations. And these are not only things that we feel inclined to say in our pre-philosophical reflections about life; they are essential to an expressivist perspective which is concerned to achieve full self-expression beyond the distortions of inauthentic desire and confined aspiration. We have to be able to distinguish

compulsions, fears, addictions from those of our aspirations which we endorse with our whole soul, not just by some quantitative criterion, but in a way which shows these latter to be more authentically ours. That is what the radical conceptions of freedom as self-dependence have tried to do in seeing our authentic aspirations as *chosen* by us, as against simply given. But it is just this radical notion of freedom which runs into the dilemma of vacuity.

Hegel laid bare the emptiness of the free self and the pure rational will, in his critique of Kant's morality and the politics of absolute freedom. And he hoped to overcome this emptiness, to give man a situation, without abandoning the notion of rational will. This was to be done by showing man to be the vehicle of a cosmic reason, which generated its articulations out of itself.

But once this solution in terms of cosmic spirit became untenable, for the reasons we examined above, the dilemma recurs, and indeed all the more pressingly in that the notion of freedom has been intensified, made at once more urgent and more all-embracing in its passage through German Idealism and its materialist transposition in Marx.

One stream of expressivism turned to an idea of fulfilment as the release of the instinctual or elemental depths beyond the ordered limits of conscious rationality. But this in the end puts paid altogether to the ideal of freedom in either modern or ancient sense. This 'elemental' notion of freedom has no place for self-possession, hence for a specifically human sense of freedom.

Schopenhauer's philosophy was an important stage on the road towards this 'Dionysiac' expressivism. But his own theory was in a sense its pessimistic inversion. Schopenhauer's concept of the 'will' and of the body as its 'objectification' derive from the expressivist stream of thought, but there is no idea of fulfilment here. On the contrary, the elemental force of the will brings man only suffering and degradation. The only hope is in release from the will which Schopenhauer sees in an end of all attachment to earthly things, after the model of Upanishadic and Buddhist thought.

Schopenhauer's vision provides a model for a deeply pessimistic view of human freedom, based on the sense that man's instinctual nature is other than and uncombinable with rational freedom, and at the same time unconquerable. It is this latter point which differentiates Schopenhauer from his mentor, Kant.

This conception of man can lead to despair about freedom understood as self-dependence, either because the untrammelled 'freedom' of the instinctual self seems worthless if not loathsome, or because

the self defined in opposition to the instinctual seems relatively powerless.

And 'despair' is the term Kierkegaard used in his *Sickness unto Death* for this inability to accept oneself. Kierkegaard makes this the point of exit, as it were, from which he steps altogether outside the tradition of freedom as self-dependence. Despair can only be overcome by relating oneself to the external 'Power which constituted the whole relation' (sc. of the self to the self),[1] i.e. God.

But the affirmation of freedom leads to a deeper dilemma, and it was Nietzsche who pushed this to its most uncompromising expression. If the radical freedom of self-dependence is ultimately empty, then it risks ending in nihilism, that is, self-affirmation through the rejection of all 'values'. One after the other, the authoritative horizons of life, Christian and humanist, are cast off as shackles on the will. Only the will to power remains. The power and impact of Nietzsche's work comes from his fierce espousal of this destructive movement which he pushes to the limit.

And yet he also seems to have held that the will to power of self-defining man would be disastrous. Man as a purely self-dependent will to power must be 'overcome', to use Zarathustra's expression. Nietzsche had an idea of this reconciliation between man's will and the course of the world in his vision of eternal recurrence, which is not easy to follow. But this idea seems to have been that pure self-affirmation must lead to an impasse, that it has at some point to link up with a deep endorsement of the course of things. 'To redeem the men of the past and to change each "Thus it was" into a "Thus I would have it!" – this alone I call redemption.'[2]

The modern notion of freedom is thus under threat from two sides. On one hand, there is despair about the realization of freedom, even doubt whether the aspiration to freedom makes any sense, in the face of the irrational and elemental in man. On the other, the ultimate emptiness of self-dependent freedom seems to lead to nihilism. Thus much philosophical thought in the last century has been engaged with this problem; how to go beyond a notion of the self as the subject of a self-dependent will and bring to light its insertion in nature, our own and that which surrounds us; or in other terms, how to situate freedom?

[1] Anchor edn (New York, 1954), p. 147.

[2] 'Die Vergagegnen zu erlösen und alles "Es war" umzuschaffen in ein "So wolte ich es!" – das hieße mir erst Erlösung' (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, part II, on Redemption).

This means recovering a conception of free activity which sees it as a response called for by a situation which is ours in virtue of our condition as natural and social beings, or in virtue of some inescapable vocation or purpose. What is common to all the varied notions of situated freedom is that they see free activity as grounded in the *acceptance* of our defining situation. The struggle to be free – against limitations, oppression, distortions of inner and outer origin – is powered by an affirmation of this defining situation as ours. *This* cannot be seen as a set of limits to be overcome, or a mere occasion to carry out some freely chosen project, which is all that a situation can be within the conception of freedom as self-dependence.

In this search for a conception of situated freedom, reductive mechanistic theories of human thought and behaviour are of no avail. They do indeed place free activity within nature, since it is one possible output of a natural system. But they do this at the cost of returning to the definition of freedom as the unchecked fulfilment of desire, and we have seen that this is inadequate, that it does not allow us to make certain essential distinctions. The notion of a freedom rooted in our nature, and yet which can be frustrated by our own desires or our limited aspirations, requires a more articulated, many-levelled theory of human motivation. It is very doubtful whether any theory which recognizes only efficient causation can do justice to it. We need the notion of a bent in our situation which we can either endorse or reject, reinterpret or distort. This is something very different from desire as it is conceived by psychologists, and it is hard to see how a bent of this kind could be explained mechanistically, even if the psychologists' 'desire' could be.

Reductive theories claim to suppress the problem of relating freedom to nature. But in fact they cannot escape it. It returns, this time unadmitted, in that the scientific objectification of human nature presupposes a subject of science whose activity and judgements about truth and depth of explanation cannot be accounted for in the reductive theory. He remains the angelic observer outside the objectified stream of life.

The fact that this problem of situating freedom has become more salient is probably not unrelated to the political and social developments mentioned in 3.1 above. In a smoothly running modern society, in which the exploitation of nature and the organization of society seem designed for the utility of individuals, it is quite natural for men to feel at home in a vision of themselves as autonomous subjects engaged in effecting their freely chosen desires and purposes. In a scientific perspective. they may indeed see themselves

as moved by drives, and their behaviour as part of a deterministic causal system. But although these two perspectives are probably incompatible, neither of them gives rise to serious question about freedom or about its relation to nature. The first is that of the subject which objectifies nature, who takes his own freedom for granted, while his goals are determined by the requirement that he play his part in the large productive enterprise in the search for individual happiness. On the second perspective, the problem of relating freedom and nature is suppressed from the outset, as we have just seen. Freedom is following the course of desire, itself determined by nature within us and without. And although these desires are not autonomous in the Kantian sense, they are clear and unambiguous and quite clearly mine as long as I identify with my own nature.[1]

But when this society is challenged and its equilibrium lost, when the more radical expressivist aspirations to total freedom gain a wide hearing, when social and individual life seem to be the prey of irrational forces – either because the social mechanisms fail to function according to 'rational' prescription (for instance, in the Depression) or because desires and aspirations come to the fore which threaten the very framework of instrumentally rational collaborative action (e.g. chauvinisms, racism, war fevers) – then the notion of the autonomous self cannot but come into question. The demand for absolute freedom raises the dilemma of self-dependence in its acutest form. And the renewed saliency of irrational and destructive cravings makes us question the very idea of autonomy, and undermines the idea of an unambiguous attribution of desire, or alternatively of our unambiguous identification with the nature in us which desires. The course of modern history has made the perspective of Schopenhauer, as presented to us by Freud and others, very familiar and plausible.

The short history of the Phenomenological movement strikingly illustrates the turn in philosophy towards the attempt to situate subjectivity. Husserl starts towards the turn of the century defending the autonomy of the rational subject against psychologism, the reduction of logic to psychology. He then goes on to explore the

[1] We can see why there is a certain link between the acceptance of reductive mechanistic theories of motivation and satisfaction with the atomistic, utilitarian, manipulative bent of our civilization. As we saw above, these theories are not really capable of coping intellectually with the self-thwarting of freedom through our compulsions or confined aspirations. Thus reductive theories are more likely to gain acceptance where this problem is not salient, i.e. where the desires that men seek to fulfil through society seem normal and spontaneous. Correlatively expressivist thought, from Rousseau on, has developed the theme of the self-thwarting of freedom.

structures of subjectivity. Even in the late 1920s with, for instance, the *Cartesian Meditations* he still sees himself as in a sense the heir of Descartes. His last work, however, turns to deal with the 'life-world', the insertion of our subjectivity in our situation as natural, embodied beings. That is what is taken up and developed by successors like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Finally what survives are the insights about embodied thought; phenomenology itself, as a 'method' of 'pure description' of subjectivity, disappears from the scene.

One can perhaps see parallel developments in Anglo-Saxon philosophy, where in recent decades there has been a growing interest in tracing the conceptual connections between thoughts, feelings, intentions etc. and their bodily expressions and antecedents.

But perhaps the most important development of twentieth-century philosophy is the focus on theories of meaning and the philosophy of language. I believe that this, too, reflects in part the desire to define a notion of subjectivity in situation, that this is one of the motivations for this new departure.

Of course, language as the vehicle of conscious, discursive thought can be studied by philosophy with all sorts of intentions. But it is a characteristic of twentieth-century discussions of language that meaning itself has been a problem; that is, they have focussed on the question: what is it for words, or language, or other signs, to have meaning?

As long as our activity as subjects, the fact that we perceive and think about the word, seems clear and unproblematic, as long as its relation to the rest of what we do and feel as living beings seems unpuzzling, the function of language also appears straightforward. Words refer to things, and we use them to think about things with. Words have meaning by pointing to things in the world, or in our thought. The unproblematic nature of the referring relation reflects the lack of question about subjectivity, about the fact that things appear for us as objects of the kind of explicit awareness in which we apply names and descriptions to them.

But our conception of language changes when this fact of explicit consciousness no longer seems something we can take for granted, seems rather an achievement and a remarkable one. For this achievement is only possible through language, which is its vehicle; and hence language becomes a relevant object of study not just as an assemblage of terms by which we designate things, but also as that by which there is such an activity as designating in the first place, as what underpins that field of explicit awareness within which it is possible to pick things out and fix them by words. In this perspective

meaning is not simply a property which pertains to each word individually, but a fact about the activity of discourse as a whole which is in a sense prior to the individual terms.

Once we see language as the vehicle of a certain mode of consciousness, which we achieve through speech, then a whole host of questions can arise concerning its relation to other modes of awareness, to other functions and activities of life, in short its *Sitz im Leben*. It ceases to be taken for granted that what we are mainly doing in language is designating and describing things, that this is the paradigm linguistic activity in relation to which all others are to be explained. On the contrary, other activities which also require linguistic consciousness to be carried through – invoking some power, performing a rite, bringing about certain states of affairs, clarifying our vision, establishing a sphere of communication – may be equally if not more primitive. That is, it may be that the meaning of certain terms and expressions can only be made clear if we understand them as occurring in the context of these activities. In these cases meaning can only be explicated by situating language in the matrix of our concerns, practices and activities, in short by relating it to our 'form of life'.

And if linguistic consciousness is an achievement to which we win through from less explicit modes, and if moreover the activities we engage in through language and symbols are various, then there are many types and levels of awareness of the world which can be embodied in words or signs. Men of any given culture may function on a number of such levels, for example in art, conversation, ritual, self-revelation, scientific study; and over history new conceptualizations and new modes of awareness emerge. It may be that our thought on any one level can only be understood by its relation to the other levels; in particular our 'higher', more explicit awareness may always repose on a background of the implicit and the unreflected.

We can easily recognize here some theses of contemporary philosophy. The later Wittgenstein has made commonplaces of the arguments for the priority of language over individual words in his discussion of the claims of ostensive definition. And he shows how the explication of meaning must end in a reference to forms of life. Polanyi has portrayed our explicit thought as an achievement, always surrounded by a horizon of the implicit, of subsidiary awareness. Heidegger speaks of linguistic consciousness as 'disclosure', as creating a field of awareness in which things can appear, and of our consciousness of things as shaped by our 'concern'. More

recently, 'structuralist' thinkers have explored language as a 'grid' embodying a certain awareness of the world.

These ways of understanding linguistic thought situate this thought in 'nature', that is, in the life of man as an embodied, social being, while avoiding a reductive account of language and meaning through a mechanistic causal theory – like behaviourism or psychologism – which suppresses all distinctions between different modes of awareness by making them unstatable. They go beyond the alternative between reductive, mechanistic theories and 'angelic' conceptions of subjectivity as disembodied thought. They open a view of subjectivity in situation. This is, of course, part of the philosophical intention of writers like Polanyi, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and other 'Continental' writers. But the connection has also come to the fore in the Anglo-Saxon world, since contemporary writers who have explored the theme of action and feeling as belonging to embodied agents have drawn heavily on the later writings of Wittgenstein.

What relation has Hegel's philosophy to this contemporary turn? Fundamental to Hegel's theory, as we saw, was the principle of embodiment. Subjectivity was necessarily situated in life, in nature, and in a setting of social practices and institutions. Hegel, as we noted in 1.2, saw language and symbols as vehicles of awareness,[1] and he saw different vehicles corresponding to different levels in the various stages of art, religion and philosophy.

In a sense, Hegel can be placed in the line of development which leads up to the contemporary ways of understanding language. Its point of origin in modern thought is perhaps Herder, who made a radical shift of the kind described above. He ceased to take for granted the relation of referring, whereby certain signs become associated with certain objects, and he focussed on the fact that there were signs at all, on linguistic consciousness, as a remarkable human power that we are very far from adequately understanding. Language is no longer just an assemblage of signs, but the vehicle of this consciousness. Herder's reaction to Condillac and the established theory of language is reminiscent at certain points of the later Wittgenstein. By seeing language as an activity expressive of a certain consciousness, Herder situates it in the life form of the subject, and hence develops the notion of different languages as expressive each of a vision peculiar to the community which speaks it.

[1] A pithy formulation of this view of language as an embodiment of awareness rather than as an assemblage of signs occurs in the *PhG* (496): '. . . die Sprache, – ein Dasein, das unmittelbar selbstbewußte Existenz ist'.

This insight was developed in the Romantic period and by thinkers influenced by the expressivist current of thought, like von Humboldt. But it seems to have gone somewhat into abeyance in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the period in which the insights of Romanticism were being reincorporated into an expanded mechanistic science. The concern and puzzlement about meaning return towards the end of the century – through the new reflections on the sciences of man which start with Dilthey and make *verstehen* their goal; as an inevitable by-product of Freud's revolutionary extensions of the notion of meaning; under the impact of the epistemological questions posed by new developments in physics and which were explored by Mach and his successors in Vienna. The concern and puzzlement are also manifest in a growing appreciation of the incoherences in the classical, referential theory of meaning, which brought Frege to open a radically new line of thought.

Hegel can be placed in this line of descent, and yet in a sense he also departed from it, may even bear part of the responsibility for the hiatus of the later part of the century. The Herderian approach to language which has recurred in contemporary philosophy sees speech as the activity by which we gain a kind of explicit, self-aware consciousness of things which as such is always related to an unreflective experience which precedes it and which it illuminates and hence transforms. This is the dimension of language which can be called 'disclosure', following Heidegger's usage, and which involves its own kind of fidelity to extra-linguistic experience. The view of language, on the other hand, which sees it as a set of signs, of which the most important are referential, makes the other dimension, the descriptive, the important and indeed the only relevant one.

Now Hegel unquestionably belongs to the first school. He sees the different 'languages' of art, religion and discursive thought as expressing an awareness of the Absolute which is not at first descriptive at all (in art) and which is never simply descriptive, since the revelation in religion and philosophy completes the *realization* of the Absolute and does not simply *portray* it. But nevertheless his thesis that the Absolute must finally come to complete, explicit clarity in conceptual statement gives the primacy in the end to the descriptive dimension. Our explicit consciousness is no longer surrounded by a horizon of the implicit, of unreflected life and experience, which it is trying to render faithfully but which can never be fully, adequately, definitively brought to light. On the contrary, in the Hegelian synthesis the unclear consciousness of the beginning is itself made

part of the chain of conceptual necessity. The unclear and inarticulate, just as the external and contingent, is itself shown to have a necessary existence. The approximate and incompletely formed is itself derived in exact, articulate concepts.

What makes possible this final victory of conceptual clarity is of course Hegel's ontology, the thesis that what we ultimately discover at the basis of everything is the Idea, conceptual necessity itself. Conceptual thought is not trying to render a reality whose foundations can never be definitively identified, nor is it the thought of a subject whose deeper instincts, cravings and aspirations can never be fully fathomed. On the contrary, at the root of reality, as in the depths of himself, the subject ultimately finds clear, conceptual necessity.

But once this ontology fades from view, what remains is the notion that descriptive conceptual thought is omnicompetent and ultimately self-sufficient, that is, that it does not in the end need to rely on a background of implicit understanding. And in this Hegel seems to emerge as the ally of those in the central tradition of modern subjectivity who take the existence of descriptive discourse quite unproblematically for granted. For they hold that the descriptive dimension alone has relevance for scientific or informative discourse, that the relation of explicit thought to unreflected experience has nothing to do with meaning, but can only be a problem for (a mechanistic, objectifying) psychology. Whereas those who are trying to relate linguistic consciousness to its matrix in unreflective life – once Hegel's logo-ontology is set aside – must necessarily see explicit thought as rooted in an implicit sense of the situation which can never be fully explored.

In other words, the new line taken by Herder, against the grain of the Enlightenment, opens the problems of the relation of our linguistic consciousness to deeper, unreflective levels of experience. Hegel in claiming the complete self-clarity of *Geist* in effect proposes to close this question as definitively solved. But as his solution fades, his far-reaching claims on behalf of conceptual thought separate him from Herder's heirs in our day, for whom the unreflective experience of our situation can never be made fully explicit, and seem to align him with those for whom the problem should never have been posed.

4. HEGEL TODAY

Hegel's double relation to this tradition which descends from

Herder, both an essential link in it and yet at odds with it, illustrates his relevance for modern philosophy. As I said at the outset, his conclusions are dead, and yet the course of his philosophical reflection is very much to the point. We can now see more clearly why.

Hegel's philosophy is an important step in the development of the modern notion of freedom. He helped to develop a conception of freedom as total self-creation, which indeed was attributable in his philosophy only to cosmic spirit, but which only needed to be transposed on to man to push the conception of freedom as self-dependence to its ultimate dilemma. He thus played an important part in the intensification of the conflict around the modern notion of freedom. For absolute freedom has acquired an unprecedented impact on political life and aspirations through the work of Marx and his successors, whose debt to Hegel needs no underlining. And one of the sources of Nietzsche's thought, which drew the nihilist consequences of this idea, was the Young Hegelian revolt of the 1840s.

At the same time Hegel was one of the profoundest critics of this notion of freedom as self-dependence. He laid bare its emptiness and its potential destructiveness with a truly remarkable insight and prescience. He has paradoxically helped both to bring this modern doctrine to its most extreme expression and to show the dilemma in which it involves us.

But most important of all, the contemporary attempt to go beyond this dilemma, to situate subjectivity by relating it to our life as embodied and social beings, without reducing it to a function of objectified nature, constantly refers us back to Hegel. In a sense the modern search for a situated subjectivity is the heir of that central aspiration of the Romantic period which Hegel thought to answer definitively – how to unite radical autonomy with the fullness of expressive unity with nature.[1] Because nature cannot be

[1] Thus one of the deep motivations of Heidegger's thought is to take us beyond the adversary stance of domination and objectification towards nature which he sees implicit in our metaphysical tradition and its offshoot, technological civilization, and inaugurate (or recover) a mode of existence in which the highest awareness is a way of 'letting things be', of disclosure. Heidegger claims to find his position foreshadowed in Hegel's friend and contemporary Hölderlin, perhaps the greatest poet of the Romantic generation (see following note).

In view of this it is not surprising that Heidegger accords a pivotal position to Hegel. He sees him as the culmination of the tradition of 'metaphysics'. But he is more than just the paradigm of what Heidegger opposes. Plainly he has drawn a great deal from Hegel, and most notably perhaps the conception of authentic awareness as a return out of forgetfulness and error. (Cf. his discussion of the Introduction to the *PhG* in *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York, 1970; translation of ch. III of *Holzwege*, 5th edn, Frankfurt, 1972).) Hence his substantive

for us what it was for that age, an expression of spiritual powers, the syntheses of the time can no longer command our allegiance.

But the problem which concerned that generation, the opposition they attempted to reconcile, continues in different forms to our day. It seems ineradicable from modern civilization, which as heir to the Enlightenment constantly reawakens expressivist protest, and along with this, the claims of absolute freedom. The very urgency with which these claims are pressed makes the search for a situated subjectivity all the more vital. And the need grows more acute today under the impact of an ecological crisis which is being increasingly dramatized in the public consciousness. The fact that we are still trying to reconcile freedom and nature makes us still at home in the Romantic period. They speak to us, however bizarre their doctrines may appear to contemporary eyes.[1]

And in so far as this search for a situated subjectivity takes philosophical form, Hegel's thought will be one of its indispensable points of reference. For although this ontological vision is not ours – indeed seems to deny the very problem as we now understand it – Hegel's writings provide one of the most profound and far-reaching attempts to work out a vision of embodied subjectivity, of thought and freedom emerging from the stream of life, finding expression in the forms of social existence, and discovering themselves in relation to nature and history. If the philosophical attempt to situate freedom is the attempt to gain a conception of man in which free

philosophical thesis is as inextricably linked with a reading of the history of philosophy as is Hegel's. But Heidegger's reading is systematically different from Hegel's. For he rejects the Hegelian culmination in the total self-clarity of subjectivity. He sees in this rather an extreme, indeed insurpassable, expression of the metaphysical stance of objectification.

[1] In the end, of all the members of the Romantic generation the most relevant may be Hölderlin, Hegel's friend and classmate at Tübingen. Hölderlin was also looking for a unity with nature which would preserve the clarity of self-possession. And his gods as well only came to themselves in human subjectivity. But they did not repose on a foundation of absolute spirit. Rather they were drawn from the primitive chaos of the elements into the light of measure and order by man, through the power of poetry and song.

Thus Hölderlin seems to open a perspective in which man's freest expression follows the prompting of nature, bringing nature in a sense into the light of freedom. But this nature is not and can never become an emanation of Spirit. It remains inexhaustible and unfathomable, a constant invitation to the creative activity which brings it to light.

Hölderlin's position is not easy to interpret. In any case it may be inaccessible to philosophical statement. And one senses that madness overtook him before his thought came to mature expression. Hegel alone was left to give definitive shape to the thoughts and insights which they shared at Tübingen and Frankfurt. But to those who want to resume the task of Hegel's generation, his too-soon-silenced friend may point a surer way.

action is the response to what we are – or to a call which comes to us, from nature alone or from a God who is also beyond nature (the debate will never cease) – then it will always recur behind Hegel's conclusions to his strenuous and penetrating reflections on embodied Spirit.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in Stuttgart, 27 August 1770, son of a civil servant in the government of the Duchy of Württemberg. He was the eldest of three children, being followed by a sister, Christiane, with whom he remained close throughout his life, and a brother, Ludwig, who subsequently became an army officer. His mother died when he was in his teens, in 1784.

Hegel attended primary school in Stuttgart, and from 1780 the Gymnasium or secondary school there. He was a conscientious student, devoting himself a great deal to classical studies, and graduating first of his class.

In 1788 he went on to the Tübinger Stift, the theology seminary attached to the State University of Tübingen. This prepared young men for service in the government, church or teaching. Hegel as the holder of a ducal scholarship lived in the seminary. He studied philosophy and theology. It was here that he began to develop his ideas on *Volksreligion*. He formed friendships with Schelling and Hölderlin at the Stift.

On graduating from the seminary in 1793, he left to take up the post of preceptor with a patrician family of Bern. This was in fact normal for young graduates, and many famous university teachers spent their first post-graduate years in this manner (including Kant and Fichte). In Bern, Hegel managed to continue reading and thinking, but felt cut off from things, and in early 1797 he gladly accepted a similar post in Frankfurt which Hölderlin had secured for him.

The next years were spent in interchange with Hölderlin and others in the stimulating environment of Frankfurt. In 1799 his father died, leaving him a modest fortune. With this in hand, Hegel began thinking of a university career. At about this time he was coming to sense that philosophy was the indispensable medium of the reconciliation he was looking for. He approached Schelling, who helped him get established at Jena, which he did in 1801.

Jena had been Germany's most exciting university in the 1790s. Schiller, Fichte, the Schlegel brothers had been there. When Hegel came it was entering its decline. Fichte had left in 1799, Schelling himself was to leave in 1803. But Hegel's years at Jena enabled him to work out the bases of his own philosophical system and become known to the philosophical world through some of his minor publications.

Hegel at first was a *Privatdozent*, that is, an unsalaried lecturer remunerated by students' fees. In his lectures of this period he began to work out the early versions of what later became his logic and philosophy of politics, at first somewhat under Schelling's influence, but later more and more

independently. In his early Jena years Hegel published his *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* and *Faith and Knowledge* (*Glauben und Wissen*, a critique of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi), and a number of articles.

In 1805, he was finally appointed professor *extraordinarius* (associate professor) at Jena, and began work on a major statement of his system, of which the first part became the *PhG*. But in October 1806, his life was rudely interrupted. Napoleon, after the battle of Jena, seized the city. In the ensuing disorder, Hegel had to leave his lodgings carrying the second half of the manuscript of the *PhG*. To cap this most turbulent period in Hegel's life, on 5 February 1807 the wife of his landlord in Jena bore him an illegitimate son, who was christened Ludwig.

Hegel was now looking for a job again, and his inherited fortune was spent. Although the *PhG* when it came out in 1807 began to make his reputation, there was little hope in those disordered times of another university appointment. Hegel's friend Niethammer found him a job editing the *Bamberger Zeitung*, and Hegel snapped at the opportunity. He enjoyed some aspects of newspaper editing, but it was not really his métier and he was glad when the following year Niethammer got him the post of headmaster and professor of philosophy at the Gymnasium of Nürnberg.

Questions of pride apart, Hegel was not too badly off at the Gymnasium. The budget was tight, and his salary was sometimes paid late, but the teaching of philosophy, even to high school students, obviously helped him to focus his thought. This period (1808–16) was very fruitful for him. It was during this time that he wrote and published the *Science of Logic* (*WL*, 1812–16).

His life was now reasonably stabilized; his work was approaching its mature statement; he continued to have hopes of an attractive offer from a university. In 1811, at the age of 41, Hegel married. His bride was Marie von Tucher, twenty years old, daughter of a Nuremberg senator. They had two sons, Karl and Immanuel, and in addition took the illegitimate Ludwig into the household.

In 1816, Hegel finally got an offer which he had expected earlier on, to a chair of philosophy in the University of Heidelberg. At the same time, feelers were sent out from Berlin where the chair had been vacant since Fichte's death in 1814. The Berlin post was much the more prestigious and attractive, but Hegel opted for the bird in hand and went to Heidelberg. Hegel threw himself back with a will into university lecturing. In his first year at Heidelberg he prepared the statement of his whole system, the *Enclyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (*EL*, *EN* and *EG*), which appeared in 1817.

But in Berlin, the chair remained vacant, and in Germany, Hegel's reputation grew. The Prussian minister of education, von Altenstein, came up with a firm offer, and Hegel accepted. In 1818 he took up the post of professor in Berlin which he held till his death.

In Berlin, Hegel came into his own. Berlin had become a major cultural centre, as well as being the capital of one of the two 'super-powers' of the German Confederation. To make an impact here was to exercise influence. And Hegel did make an impact. He rapidly grew to be the major figure in German philosophy, and the influence of his thought spread to other

related fields, law and political thought, theology, aesthetics, history. Many came to his lectures, and a number became disciples. Hegel's thought more or less dominated German philosophy for two decades, the 1820s and 1830s. He was fortunate enough to die in the middle and not at the end of this apogee.

In his Berlin period, Hegel wrote the *Philosophy of Right* (*PR*, published 1821), and put together the great lecture cycles which were published after his death, on the philosophy of history, aesthetics, the philosophy of religion and the history of philosophy.

In 1829, at the height of his fame, Hegel was elected Rector of the University. But on 14 November 1831, he died suddenly and unexpectedly of what was diagnosed as cholera at the time, but was more likely a stomach ailment which had been giving him trouble in previous years. He was buried next to Fichte, accompanied on his last journey by a long cortège of students, colleagues and disciples.

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